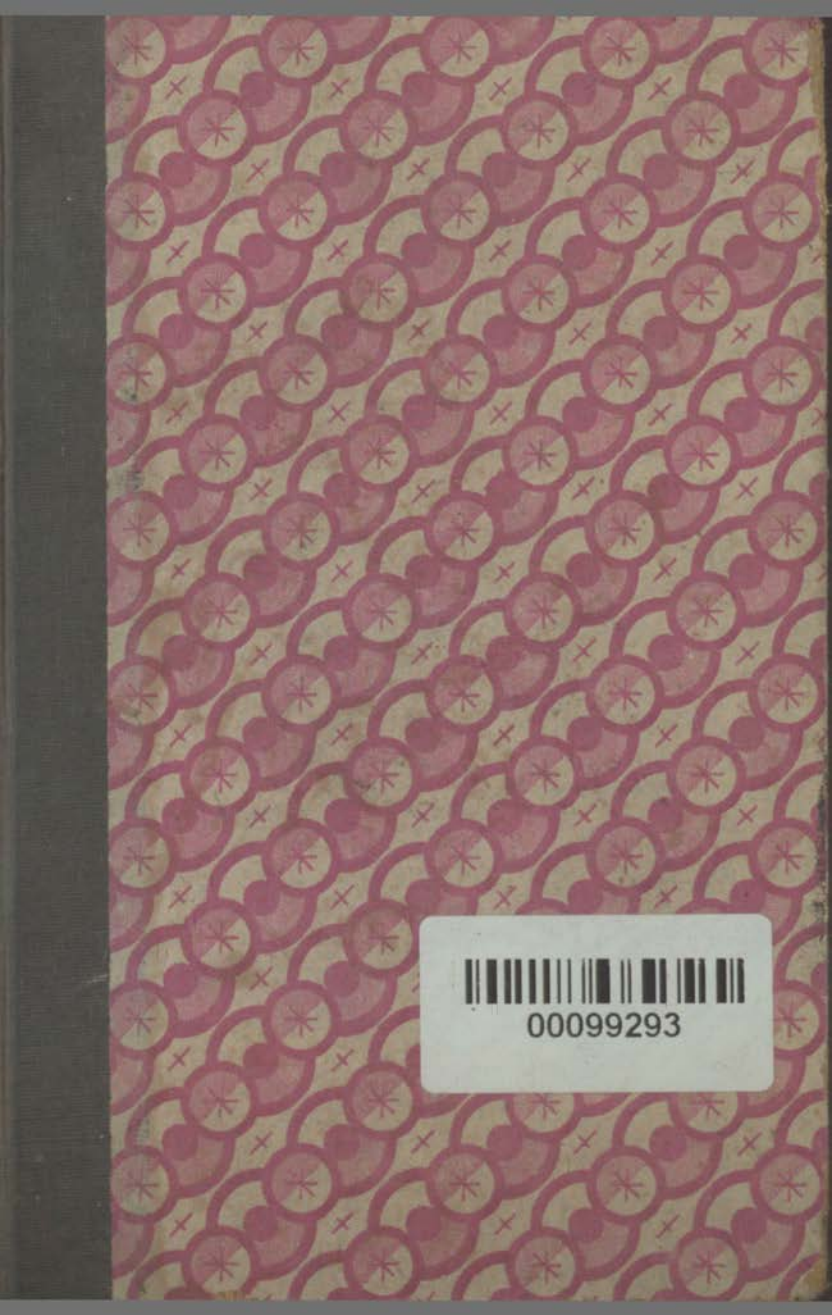
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The Book of Months

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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SCARLET AND HYSSOP
THE LUCK OF THE VAILS
MAMMON AND CO.
THE PRINCESS SOPHIA

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The Book of Months

By

E. F. Benson

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1903

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TO MY MOTHER

CONTENTS

	PAGE
JANUARY	1
FEBRUARY	23
MARCH	49
APRIL	79
MAY	97
JUNE	121
JULY	139
AUGUST	165
SEPTEMBER	197
OCTOBER	225
NOVEMBER	251
DECEMBER	273

JANUARY

JANUARY

THICK yellow fog, and in consequence electric light to dress by and breakfast by, was the opening day of the year. Never, to anyone who looks at this fact in the right spirit, did a year dawn more characteristically. The denseness, the utter inscrutability of the face of that which should be, was never better typified. We blindly groped on the threshold of the future, feeling here for a bell-handle, here for a knocker, while the door still stood shut. Then, about mid-day, sudden commotions shook the vapours; dim silhouettes of house-roofs, promised lands perhaps, or profiled wrecks, stood suddenly out against swirling orange whirlpools of mist; and from my window, which commanded a double view up and down Oxford Street, I looked out over the crawling traffic, with an interest, as if in the unfolding of some dramatic plot, on the battle of the skies. From sick dead

yellow the colour changed to gray, and for a few moments the street seemed lit by a dawn of April; then across the pearly tints came a sunbeam, lighting them with sudden opalescence. Then the smoke from the house opposite, which had been ascending slowly, like a tired man climbing stairs, was plucked away by a breeze, and in two minutes the whole street was a blaze of primrose-coloured sunshine.

All that week I was work-bound in London—a place where, as everyone knows, there are forty-eight hours in every twenty-four. The reason for this is obvious. It is impossible to sit idly in a chair in London; it is impossible (almost) to read a book, and it is (happily) quite impossible to write one. Hence the hours are multiplied. The sound and spectacle of life induces a sort of intoxication of the mind. Ten yards of Piccadilly is a volume, and the Circus an improper epic. Hence the impossibility of reading; the books are in the flowing tides that jostle from house-wall to house-wall, and they are vastly more entertaining than anything that publishers have ever had the good fortune to bring out.

Now, people who are incapable of reading book-print—of which the enormous mass is very sorry stuff—are held to be uneducated; but it seems to me that people who cannot read, or at any rate conjecture at, this splendid human print are much more ignorant. For it is here in these places, alive with the original words and phrases out of which all books are made, that there lies the key to all books that are worth reading at all. At any rate, here lies the material; it is here, and nowhere else, that the *chef* does his marketing. There are, however, several rules to be observed if you would read the original. The first is, that you must attend with all your might; the book, so to speak, shuts automatically if you cease to attend. The second is, that you must at a moment's notice be ready to pity and to praise. The third—and perhaps the most important of all—is, that you must never be shocked. For the whole attitude of the observer is covered by pity or praise. The Great Author does not want his moral condemnation, and, in addition to this, there is nothing so blinding to one's self as being shocked. It is like looking through a telescope at one point only, and that

probably wrongly focussed ; for it is focussed by one's own individual code, which is almost certainly wrong. It is Human Life you are looking at ; if that is not good enough for you, go and look at something else. There are plenty of dull things in the world, but remember always that, if you find other people dull, it is only a sign that a dull person is present. But if you are to read the book Living, come humble and alert. Try to catch the point of every phrase, for of this you may be sure—that there is a point. You will find there, thank God! many pages that will make you laugh —laugh, that is, properly, with sheer childish, unreflecting amusement ; you will find there things that will make you think ; and you will certainly find there things that will make you want to weep. And if we knew a little, instead of knowing nothing, we should probably—no, certainly—fall on our knees, and thank God for that also.

One of each of these occurred to me to-day. The first was when I was coming out of the club with a friend on our way to dinner. An obsequious porter held the club door open, an obsequious page-boy stood by our glittering

hansom, with a hand on the wheel. My friend had an opulent appearance and wore a fur coat. On the pavement were standing two exceedingly small and ragged boys, and one of them whose hair drooped over his eyes like a Skye terrier, seeing this resplendent exit, put his thumbs in the place where the armholes of his waistcoat would have been, had the merry little devil had one, and, with his nose in the air, said very loud to the other, 'Whare are we doining to-night, Bill?'

The second made one laugh at first, but think afterwards, and it was thus: At the corner of Dover Street there lay a heap of mud and street sweepings, and as we drew up just opposite, blocked by an opposing tide of carriages in Piccadilly, a small, very dapper little gentleman in dress-clothes stepped into the middle of this muck-heap, with the result that one of his dress-pumps was drawn off his unfortunate foot with a 'cloop' and stuck there. On to it there swooped a vulture of the highway, a lad of about twenty, who picked it out, and made off down Dover Street with it. Now, what good was one shoe to him? Would he not have done better to have wiped it carefully

on his coat, which really could not have deteriorated farther, and chanced a tip from the dapper little gentleman? Or was the instinct of stealing so strong that he never stopped to think? One would have supposed that a tip was a practical certainty.

The third sight was merely a matter for tears.

I walked back from dinner, and my way lay up Piccadilly again. At a populous corner stood a very stout elderly woman, dressed in violent and ridiculous colours. Her hair was golden, her eyebrows broad, thick and vilely drawn, her cheeks so burned with rouge that one blushed. She addressed every passer-by in endearing terms. None regarded her. That was quite right; but the pity of her standing there on this squally night, with her horrid mission and her total ill-success! Yes, it is difficult to thank God for that.

After five days I got deliverance from this entrancing slavery, and, like a cork from a bottle, flew to Grindelwald. The journey I remember as a dreadful dream, for I had a cold so bad that all sense of taste, smell, and most of hearing and

feeling, had passed from me, and I seemed to myself to be a rough deal board being sent by train, and turned out into a drizzling night at what appeared to be mere cowsheds on the line, simply for the purpose of declaring that I had no spirit or lace about me. Spirit! The Queen of Sheba when she had seen Solomon in all his glory had more. As to lace, that diaphanous material seriously occupied my waking dreams as we mounted the Jura. Was there anything in my face that suggested lace, I wondered, or did lace frillings peep out from my trousers? Anyhow, why lace? I was really almost anxious to declare five hundred cigarettes, but nobody suggested such a thing. Then——

The new heaven and the new earth, an earth covered with powdery snow, thatched here and there by pines, and reaching beyond all power of thought, by glacier and snowfield and rocks too steep for the settling of the snow, into the pinnacles of the Eiger and the Wetterhorn. From ridge to ridge the eye followed, lost in amazement at the wonder of the earth and the greatness of its design. Austere and silent rose the virgin

snows, and more silent, growing from words to exclamation, and from exclamation to silence itself, one's wonder. There, out of the void and formless pulp which was once the world, they were set, barren, fruitless, useless, and that is the wonder of them and their glory. Centuries have been as but seconds in the life of an idle man in the forming of them ; for centuries that have been to them but the winking of an eye they have raised their immemorial crests, and the centuries shall be as the sea-sand before they crumble. O ye Mountains and Hills, praise ye the Lord! Every day you praise Him.

Now, this "Book of Months" is almost certainly worth nothing, anyhow, and I take this opportunity to inform critics so, in case (as is not likely) they have the slightest doubt about it. But if they and I are wrong, it will be because we have both overlooked the possible value of a true document—true, that is, as far as I personally am able to make it true. Therefore I will state at once that for the next four weeks the childish pursuit of making correct lines and edges on the ice occupied me much more, except on a few

occasions, than all the mountains, all the heavenly blue of the sky, or the divine radiance of the marching sun. Instead of attending to those big and beautiful things, I got up, day after day, full of anxious thoughts, and had I been assured that these anxieties would never trouble me again on condition that I never again looked at the Eiger, or the scarlet finger of the Finster-Aarhorn that caught the sunset long after the sun had set to us, I would quite certainly have closed with the bargain. Those who do not know what a clean outside-back-counter means can have no voice in this affair, since they are not acquainted with the subject-matter of it, but those who do will, I believe, extend to me their pitying sympathy. For no known reason, I desired to make these and other turns, which when made are of no conceivable use to anybody, and full of anxious thoughts, which violent collisions with the elusive material on which I performed fully justified, I proceeded to devote the hours of light to these utterly indefensible pursuits. I wished to execute a movement in which the skate left a certain mark on the ice, and no other (I am alluding, of

course, to involuntary change of edge), and to make these and other marks on the ice (continuous loops, bracket-eight, and a few more, for the sake of the curious) I signed a bond, so to speak, for three weeks of my short mortal life. All morning, that is to say, I struggled with these evanescent scratchings, ate a hurried lunch, and struggled again till it was dark. Really, it is very odd, and I hope to do the same next winter. I am perfectly aware that I could have spent my time much better, or, at any rate, tried to. I knew that at the time ; but I did not care then, and I do not care now.

There were sane intervals, however. For instance, one Saturday evening it began to snow. Now, I see nothing conceivably wrong in skating on Sunday, and am unable to comprehend the position of those who do. But it is certainly wrong to skate on Sunday when it will spoil the ice on Monday, and on this particular Sunday I went to church in the morning, and afterwards took a sandwich lunch from the hotel, and, tying it securely to a toboggan, sat myself insecurely on the toboggan, and went alone—that was an

essential part of the plan—down past the church and through the village, through fields of white snow that spouted as the toboggan met them, even as the spray spouts round the bows of a liner. In nothing, I suppose, does a man (unless he be M. Santos Dumont) come nearer to the ecstasy of flight, some low skimming flight that follows the contour of the ground as swallows when storm is imminent. So went I down an ever-steepening mile, finishing at the end just by the side of the bridge that crosses the stream from the glacier. The frost had been severe for the last week, and this was nearly covered over with lids of ice that grew out from backwaters and extended almost from bank to bank. Wherever a stone stood in mid-current, there below it had the ice first gathered, groping its way downstream till the cold feeler reached another stone. Then, already half established, it had broadened and broadened till a third anchorage met it. But in certain swift places the water still ran unchecked, its flow, of course, greatly diminished with the lesser melting of the glacier in winter, but still busy, busy, seeking the sea with steadfast purpose. Round the

banks and in the bed itself of the stream grew an immense company of alders covered completely with the inimitable confectionery of frost, a forest of spiked branches.

Then mounting again, I passed up a long gentle slope by a few outlying châlets, and, having come out of the shadow of the Eiger, sat down to lunch. The air was utterly windless, the frost so keen that not a flake of snow clung to my clothes, yet through the glory of that pellucid air the sun struck so hot that a coat was altogether a superfluity. Eastwards the Wetterhorn rose in glacier and snowfield, and its superb and patient beauty, as of some noble woman waiting for the man she loves, struck me with a pang of delight. Thereafter still climbing, I entered the pine-woods below the Scheidegg, where the sun drew out a thousand woodland and resinous smells, as if odorous summer instead of midwinter held sway.

Alone! I had intended to be alone, but never was a man in more delectable company. Trees, glimpses of the gorgeous dome above them, drifts of driven snow, were my companions, while, if one grew overbold, there was the Eiger to hazard

a respectful remark to, and the sun itself to be worshipped. On no other day, indeed, that I can remember have I felt so strong a sympathy with Parsees. High it swung, benignant, and all for the fir-trees and me. Then rising higher, I came to the edge of the wood and the beginning of the snowfields again, and, resting for a moment, did an exceedingly childish thing. Underneath a piece of spreading root of the last tree of that heavenly wood I hid a Bryant and May's match-box containing a stick of chocolate, an English sixpence, two nickel coins of ten centimes, a short piece of pencil, and four matches. These I dedicate to the wayfarer should he need a light. Also I should ask him to write his name with the pencil and put it in the match-box, and, if he feels as foolish as I, add some small object of no value. Next year I will go there again, and make some further striking additions to the *cache*. The tree is a large one on the left of the path, and quite notably the *last in the wood*. My initials are rudely carved in the piece of root directly above the *cache*. An intelligent traveller knowing this can hardly miss the place.

Now, where shall we look for the origin of this instructive piece of foolishness? This is not a merely egotistic query, for I am perfectly certain that many sober and mature citizens like myself will feel sympathy with childishness that rejoices in such *caches* as I made on the slopes of the Scheidegg. Is it that we still preserve, even in this well-civilized and restauranted century, some cell in our brain which even now obeys the prudent instincts of some remote cave-dwelling ancestor, and do we now in play imitate his serious precautions? Or—and I like to think this better—have we still, in spite of our sober maturity, some remnants still of an heritage more priceless than cave-dwelling ancestors, namely, the lingering joys of our own childhood? On the whole, the evidence points this way, especially when I consider in connection with this certain other survivals, like that of 'talking French.' Here I feel that I may be treading on alien ground; the *cache* habit, I know, is not rare, but I have not at present met anyone who 'talks French,' of which the manner is as follows.

Everyone, I suppose, has moments of sheer physical enjoyment. I need mention two only:

the one, getting into bed, with legs curled up, ere yet the freezing sheets can be encountered; the other, when very cold getting into a hot bath, a bath, that is to say, so hot that it is on the border between bliss and anguish, when, in fact, to move is to scream. On these occasions—for loneliness is essential,—I 'talk French'; that is to say, streams of gibberish flow in a hushed voice from my lips, in the form of dialogue, and anyone present would hear remarkable things of this nature :

(With deep anxiety) 'Usti Icibon?'

(Reassuringly) 'Mimi molat isto pacher.'

(Reassured) 'Kaparando guilli. Amatinat skolot.'

I blush to reproduce more. But I long to know if anybody else 'talks French.' I want to talk it with somebody, and compare vocabularies.

A long colloquy was held that afternoon, sitting in the sun, after the *cache* was made, and then towards sunset I started to go back through the pine-wood with dim but welcome thoughts of bears and brigands lying in wait on each side the path. One corner I remember I particularly feared, for low-growing bushes bordering the path might conceal almost anything. That I had good reason

to fear it I soon found out, though I had feared it for wrong reasons, for my toboggan threw me with reckless gaiety into the middle of those same bushes. In fact, for the first half-mile the track was abominable ; bare stones and tree-roots alternated with passages of breathless rapidity ; never have I experienced a quicker succession of violences. But as the wood grew less dense the texture of the going became more uniform, and for the last mile I hissed downwards with ever-increasing speed and smoothness through the pallor of the snow-bright dusk. Large stars beamed luminous overhead, and from scattered cottages sprang the twinkling lights, showing that all were home from the frozen fields and safe within walls. Then, wonder of wonders! the full moon rose over the top of the Wetterhorn with a light as clear as running water and as soft as sleep, making complete with its perfection this perfect day.

The other interlude from this rage of tracing useless marks on the ice was a funeral. The funeral was that of Slam's kitten, though the kitten was not really Slam's at all. But, to go back to the beginning of things, it is necessary

that you should know who Slam was. Her real name was Evelyn Helen Anastasia, and goodness knows what; but what matters more is that she was a child six years and one month old, freckle-faced, snub-nosed, devoted to animals and the outside edge, and by far the most popular person in the hotel. It was the outside edge originally that had brought us together, for she had told me that I didn't do it properly, and, very kindly showing me how, she had fallen heavily on the ice. As I picked her up, she said:

'You see what I mean, don't you? Let me show you again.'

Under her tuition I improved, and, what was more important, our friendship ripened. I am proud to think that I was the only person who ever heard about the kitten, which had followed Slam—I am sure I don't wonder—with pitiful mewings, down from the Happy Valley, an ownerless beast that would have touched hearts more hard than Slam's. She kept it in a cupboard in her room and fed it with cake. This I learned on the second day of the kitten's imprisonment. That evening it died. I will pass over Slam's

lamentations, and the wealth of falsehood by which I convinced her that a diet of cake in an airless cupboard was the only thing that could have saved it. Then, as it was dead, it had to be buried, still without the cognizance of Slam's nurse, whom I feared.

'I don't want a lot of people,' said Slam. 'It would be much nicer if we buried her quietly. So when nurse is at dinner I will bring her down in my hat.'

Meantime I had procured a cardboard box, and from Slam's hat the kitten passed into its coffin. The coffin was put on our toboggan—for Slam and I were going to lunch out—and the catafalque left the hotel.

Slam put her hand into mine—a compliment that only children can pay—and we debated about the cemetery. I personally inclined to the river-bed at the bottom of the valley, but Slam would have none of it.

'Up above,' she said, 'it is cleaner;' and, though it was all pretty clean, I assented. 'Then we can eat our lunch and toboggan down,' she added. This was common-sense; to walk up

after the funeral would be depressing ; we might recover our lightness of spirit if we left the tobogganing till afterwards.

On the way up, through the village, that is, and towards the glacier, the talk turned on serious subjects. Did I believe that animals would have a resurrection? Why did God make them if they were just to die and be finished? Again, if they were to have a resurrection, was it not proper to bury them properly ? Thus we arrived at the cemetery. Four pine-trees stood there, with snow drifted high between them ; the benediction of the sun hallowed the place ; never had anyone a more virgin tomb. We scooped out the snow down to soil-level, and dropped the box into the excavation. Then with pious hands we covered it up, and on the top of the cairn planted sprigs taken from the pines.

'And now I will say my prayers,' said Slam.

She knelt down in the snow, and, even with the fear of her nurse before my eyes, I could say nothing to dissuade her, but knelt by her and uncovered my head. And then Slam said the Lord's Prayer, and asked that she might be a good girl

always, and prayed that God might bless her father and mother and nurse and me.

Do you know what it is to be remembered in the prayers of a child? Then she paused: 'and the kitten,' she added. And I said 'Amen.'

So there the kitten lies, between the sky and the beautiful snow-clad earth. Pines whisper about it, and the Wetterhorn and Eiger watch over its resting-place. And Slam said her prayers there.

What follows? As far as I am concerned, this: I believe that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together, and that there will be one day a great healing and comforting. And when on that day, mysteriously, unintelligibly, that little body, which meantime has fed the grasses and the alpine flowers of the place, comes to itself and is alive again, I believe that a happy little kitten will stand between those four pine-trees, lost no longer. And Slam and I will recognise it. And the kitten—who knows?—will recognise us, and Slam will say again, in the phrase that is so often on her lips:

'Oh, it is nice!'

FEBRUARY

FEBRUARY

A QUANTITY of wholly uninteresting things have happened. I have with infinite rackings of thought made £290 on the Stock Exchange, and never was money more hardly earned. I am also well on the way to lose the whole of it. If, as seems highly probable, I do, never will money be more hardly lost. I have returned from Grindelwald to find a London of the most icy cold, followed by a London of the most sickening tepidity, swimming in mud, the colour of which and the texture of which is that of nightmares. A pallid daylight strikes through rods of rain, the streets smell of mackintosh, and an unfathomable depression prevails. The County Council have seized this unrivalled opportunity for taking up the whole of the principal thoroughfares, and it is impossible to get anywhere without going in a totally different direction. I

played bridge last night, revoked and was not detected, which argues a mournful level of intelligence both in one's self and one's adversaries, and went to bed only to dream of a fifth suit, which, dimly veiled, swallowed aces of trumps, or any such cards, like oysters, a gulp and no more, and woke to find the same dark streaming and leaden heavens.

It is the weather that with me is chiefly responsible both for these despondencies and for sky-scraping spirits. And I know of nothing so hard to bear as weather-depressions. One cannot by employment of idleness get rid of them, so long as the conditions that gave the depressions birth still continue. And of all weather-depressions the one that occurs when spring struggles to be born from dying winter is the most despondent. One's body, especially after a month in Switzerland, has been adjusted to low temperatures, and the effect of the change is the same as that produced by a tepid bath in the morning instead of a cold one. Briskness of body and spirit alike vanish, and to-day, though I am accustomed to these annual visitations, I went

so far as to take my temperature, there being, as I well knew, nothing whatever the matter with me. Of course it was normal.

This transition-weather has now lasted a week, but there have been certain intervals and alleviations. One of these occurred last Sunday. I went in the afternoon to the Oratory at Brompton, and heard that service of Vespers and Benediction which, whether mumbled unintelligibly by a shabby priest in an empty church, or conducted with that splendid sense of 'form' which characterizes the Oratory, never fails to give me a feeling of 'uplifting' which I cannot hope to express. There in the morning has the symbol of that Divine Mystery been laid on the Lord's Table, and there after the candles have been lit, and the worshipper cleansed by the incense, is again revealed the 'Salutaris Hostia,' the sign, outward and visible, of the Love through which existence is.

Then I crossed the park, and by degrees the unutterable languor of the early spring began to thaw its way back into me, when suddenly I saw a large tract of grass white with snowdrops that

had budded and blossomed in the last few days. Pointed leaves with the white line one knows so well had first pricked the ground; then the weak, soft flower had followed, led upwards from the buried bulb by the instinct it must obey, for no purpose—who knows?—but to remind a stupid person or two like me that there were other things in the world besides him. And I swear to you that as I looked I blushed with shame. To-morrow I shall go and look at them again, for I am afraid the memory is no longer medicinal.

Depend upon it, there is nothing so morbid as to encourage in one's self 'questionings.' Any average ordinary person who walks down a London street, and for five minutes devotes himself to the problem as to what is the meaning of all these swarming people, what do they make of their lives, what is the ultimate outcome—it is easy enough to find words, but quite unnecessary—will reduce himself to a state of maudlin incompetence in a week's time. It is emphatically not one's business to be cheaply vague in this manner, and the man who helps a stumbler—be he drunk or sober—across a street, or rings a bell for a

small child who cannot reach it, has done his duty and his part in the world's work far better that day than any philosopher who thinks a great deal and does nothing. Indeed, I doubt not that a man who makes a friend smile at some idiotic remark has better earned his daily bread than the man who has given rise to profound thought, if thought is only to end in thought. 'The world is made by the poet for the dreamer' was said by someone—I forget who. He might just as well have said, 'The world is made by the butcher for the baker.'

It is a very false estimate we should get of the world if we only looked at other people from our own standpoint. It is useless, for instance, to imagine one's self in the position of a newsboy from whom I usually buy an evening paper at the corner just outside. He is frightfully ragged. Why his coat, for instance, holds together at all is beyond my comprehension, and his boots are in a similar state of disintegration. Certainly, if it was my lot to stand at that corner earning a penny only out of every twelve papers I sold, and for the sake of earning my bread at all being com-

pelled to stand there for hours in frost, rain or fog, I should quite assuredly be most unhappy. Yet nothing is falser than to imagine that he is unhappy; he has, on the contrary, a 'frolic welcome' for everything that comes along, and evidently circumstances which would depress what we may call the comfortable classes have no effect whatever on his spirits. On the other hand, there are things which happen to you and me every day, which we bear without undue complaints, that would be almost insufferable to him. He would certainly revolt at a bath in the morning; and though he would very likely be pleased at the breakfast that followed it, I feel by no means certain that he would not sooner sit on a coal-sack and chaff the nearest policeman, as he does, with his mouth bulging with large crusts. Again, I doubt whether 'the bloke,' which is the name by which he is known in the neighbourhood of his stand, could live through the sort of morning we live through. He would consider it so unbearably dull to have to sit in a room for hour after hour, while London and the humming streets roared outside, and read a book—or, worse, write

one. For supposing we endue him for a moment with that sort of veneer of the mind which we call culture, literary taste, artistic taste, or what not, a thing which he does not probably possess at present, even then, should we set him down at 'Romeo and Juliet,' let us say, what will be his verdict? Why, that he can see the thing itself every evening, and, perhaps, has acted it, too, poor little devil! and why should he spend his time in reading a pale moonlight translation when the original jostles him? Here at this point, of course, the *literati* will hold up hands of horror. Do I mean to say, they will ask, that the immortal tragedy I have referred to is to be brought into comparison, even for a jest, with the idylls of the street corner, with the walking out of a man with a maid, a marriage in the registry office, or, perhaps, the omission of that ceremony? Yes, if they will think, I mean all that. For why, if we consider the question more closely, does the tragedy of 'Romeo and Juliet' strike us, and rightly, as a masterpiece? and why does the sordid account of 'murder and suicide' in the daily press strike us as a page to be turned over with a

'poor thing!' shudder, if we are people of discernment, but if we are only refined to be passed over in utter unconsciousness? It is because Shakespeare showed us the terror and the tragedy of one, and we have not the genius to see the terror and the tragedy of the other. Had not Shakespeare been a man of human insight, he could never have written his plays; but if we could see, we should find in life what he found. That he gave it in the form of drama to the world is another matter. That was because Nature—or I prefer to say God—gave a man of this humanity this power of speech as well as the sense of drama. Hundreds, I soberly believe, felt as keenly as Shakespeare felt, but are, so to speak, born dumb; hundreds could write as Shakespeare wrote, could they but feel. It is this conjunction of the two, rare as the transit of Venus, that makes the supreme artist.

To return to 'the bloke.' All morning we have given him a translation instead of the original, and the morning over we give him lunch. He will eat largely, because for all the years he has lived it has been his instinct to eat

all there was to eat, for fear that there would soon be nothing to eat when he wanted to eat. He will drink in immoderation for the same reason, and grow somnolent. But he is plucked from his slumber to call on someone who bores him, to be polite when he does not want to be polite, and he will return to 'dress' in a collar that hurts him, and to eat a dinner which he does not want. That evening he will be sick, and three days later have a bilious attack.

But turn from this gloomy picture to the reality. 'The bloke,' as I saw him this evening, had a huge crust stuffed into one cheek; in the other corner of his mouth was a cigarette. There was news about a test match in Australia, and papers were going like hot cakes. His pockets were not to be trusted, and that mouth of his had eight coppers on one side, and the crust, not yet masticated, on the other. But did 'the bloke' think about verdigris-poisoning and other inanities? Not a bit. If there was a moment to spare, wet pennies were ejected and stowed in a pocket somewhere at the back of his trousers. If there was no moment to spare, he merely cursed

and prayed for a sixpence which got rid of five wet pennies. All the time he was shouting 'Re-markable Collapse!' chaffing the policeman at the corner, shouting hoarse profanities to the drivers of passing buses, and ogling miles of girls of his acquaintance.

Now consider, oh my cultured friend, where would you and I have been in such a crisis, which, you must remember, was a feast and a high-day to 'the bloke.' We should have retired behind a hoarding to eat our crust, and sat still—God help us—for several minutes in order to digest it. Then we should have lost the cream of the sale. Then, coyly re-entering Oxford Street, we should have murmured quaveringly, 'A Bad Score on the Colonial Side'; we should have put our pennies in the untrustworthy pocket, whence they would have slithered coldly down our legs on to the pavement. Grasping the inadequacy of this, we should have held them in our other hand, and impeded the swift passage of the papers. We should have cast apprehensive glances at the policeman for fear he should tell us to move on —he tells 'the bloke' to move on, and 'the

bloke' says 'Garn!'—we should have frowned at bus-drivers who nearly ran over us, and made a feint of taking their numbers. We should have made a quantity of depressing reflections about the young women in London, so bold and bad-mannered, and as an upshot we should have sold, with infinite depression, one-fifth of what 'the bloke' sells with a gusto indescribable. And what is, perhaps, worst of all, we should have prayed that evening, if we were not too sleepy, for all the starving, homeless creatures of the street. 'The bloke' does not pray—but if he did, he would say, with Browning, 'God's in His heaven; all's right with the world.'

Exit 'the bloke.'

P.S. No, not exit just then. Yesterday only, I was coming round the corner from Davies Street, and caught sight of 'the bloke' dancing excitedly in mid-street, with his sheaf of papers, shouting the verdict of the Tonbridge murder. Next moment he had been knocked down by an omnibus and the wheel had gone over him. With many others I ran out into the roadway, and it so happened I was there first.

I picked 'the bloke' up and carried him to the pavement. His head bent inwards from my elbow to my chest, and two wet pennies fell into the crook of my arm from his mouth. His sheaf of papers had fallen from him and still lay in the road. Before we reached the pavement he looked up and saw me.

'I'm damned dirty, sir,' he said; 'take care of your noo coat. That bloody bus—— Gawd —I'll talk to Jim—running over me like that.'

There was an ambulance near at hand, and I delivered up 'the bloke.' Someone had picked up his papers from the roadway and put them by the side of the thin little body, and the pennies which he had dropped out of his mouth I put there too.

Next day I went to the hospital where he had been taken. But 'the bloke' will not stand at his corner any more.

Sad? Heaven help us all if we are going to be sad, because we are (quite assuredly) going to die; the sooner we die and get it over, the better. Anticipating sadness is an absolute drug in the

market, and is it not better to be glad because at the present moment we happen to be alive, and not sad because at some future moment we are going to die? How long would the world go on if we all sat and sighed because we were going to die?

Yes, decidedly spring has come, and it amazes me to look back on what I wrote only a week ago, and find myself so blinded by that moment of languor which announced it, as not to have foreseen what should so shortly follow. Yet if that obsession of languor had not been so complete, I suppose this effervescence of spring would not have run riot in me as it did, and it is with infinite misgivings that I attempt to put into words any of that bubbling thrill, that ecstasy in the sensation of mere living, which is felt, I believe, in every growing thing, down to the humblest blade of grass which is trodden underfoot, even as the varnish of springtime is on it—at that divinest of all moments in the year, when in man and brute and as yet leafless tree the sap once more stirs.

This year it came upon me in spate; that great

flood of renewed vitality which follows round the earth from continent to continent as the spring returns suddenly lifted me off my feet, dictating what I did as imperatively as an electric current dictates the involuntary twitching of the muscles it passes through. And on this wise.

I was out of town for two days last week, staying in Sussex at a house on the high down-land near Ashdown Forest. As I drove from the station, I was aware that some huge and subtle change was in the air, but put it down only to the contrast of country breezes with the density of London. The briskness of winter was alto-gether gone, but in its place was the smell of earth and growing things, very fragrant and curiously strong; for rain, which brings out all scent into the air, be it good or bad, had fallen heavily that afternoon, drawing out, as I have said, the smell of growth, and leaving behind it, just as a water-cart does in streets, the smell of dust laid, or, rather, the smell which air has when there is no longer any dust in it. Also the vividness of colour surprised me; and in the yet leafless trees there was a certain vigorous look,

which I had missed all winter, a crispness of outline, a look of tension as in an instantaneous photograph of a man about to leap. A thrush bubbled suddenly in a bush by the roadside, and, fool that I was, I did not know what was happening. I thought it was only a thrush singing. But had I known, it was spring.

That night after dinner, instead of sitting down to bridge or some gray pursuit glorified by the title of game, eight sober and mature people did the silliest things. We played blindman's-buff; we cock-fought on the hearth-rug; we fell heavily to the ground in attempting to take out with our teeth pins placed in inaccessible positions on the legs of chairs: nobody cared what anybody else was doing; everyone talked simultaneously and laughed causelessly. Eventually we dispersed to our rooms flushed and hot.

My window had been shut, and a blind drawn down: here were the first things to be remedied; up went the screaming blind, up went the window, and the huge, exultant night poured in. That was better, but still bad, and I tore off my clothes, leaving them on the floor, and as my mother

bore me, and as I shall go back to the great mother of all, leaned out into the night, full of the excitement which at last I understood. It was night—night, the time when even a stock-broker (who had made £290 on the Stock Exchange) reverts in some degree to the beast from which he has been evolved, when, unless one is fuddled with wine, or stupefied with food, or addled and rotten with sensual thought, one occasionally wins back to the old primeval prowling, excited joy of being alive, to the bliss which childhood knows in nightfall, robbed of its terrors. There it was, waiting for me, and I, as far as might be, ready for it, free from all desire, carnal, mental, or spiritual, but caught and burning in the flame of mere life. Huge and soft the night beckoned; humped gray shapes of bushes were blots on the lawn outside, above them rose the still gaunt shapes of trees, but hissing like a gas-jet with the pressure from within. Rain-clouds obscured the sky, the cold infinite stars were shut out, and only by the fact that it was not very dark did I know that the moon was somewhere risen, though invisible. That was as I

would have it: for the time I was just a Live Thing, conscious of life. I wanted no distant stars to remind me how small I was, or how immense was heaven—for the time I desired only the kind warm earth—no moon to evoke, as she always does, the need of companionship. I was about on this earth, which, like I, was bursting with the promise of spring. Mating-time was not yet; not yet was the time of fresh leaves, or any outward sign of vitality. The vitality was within, everything had drawn a long breath, and the long breath hung suspended for the moment. Soon in a shower of starlike blossoms, in a mist of green hung round the trees, in the complete song of birds, in achievement or effort on my part, the tension would break. It was the physical moment when completion is assured, and the pause comes, delicious because all, all has been leading up to this, and one is content, if it is possible to be content, because fruition is sure. Exquisite pangs have gone before, the pangs of anticipation. Exquisite pangs of completion will follow, but nothing can ever approach the completeness of the assured moment.

Night and its veiled darkness, a soft rain falling and hissing among the shrubs, the sleeping house—unless, indeed, there might be other watchers like myself unclothed beside an open window—utter loneliness, and the thrill of life. But it was not enough to stand there; I had to mix with the night, I had to do my utmost to take it, the dripping shrubs, the falling rain, the whole growing, quickening earth, nearer to me. It was not enough to look at it. So for convention's sake I pulled on trousers again, buttoned a coat over me, and, hatless and barefooted, opened my window further—a ground-floor window—and stepped out into the night. What I wanted I did not know: it was certain, at any rate, I did not want anybody else to be there; yes, I know, I wanted only to be part of the growing sap-stirred world. No thought of either spiritual or carnal aspiration did I feel; no gratitude to God, who made this ecstatic machine called me, entered into my mind, no thought of love or lust or desire. The gray curtain of cloud was the blanket under which, like a child, I buried my head; I was too far gone, you will understand, to 'talk French';

simply, I was possessed by the joy of life, that life which moved my muscles, making them tense and slack in turn as I walked, that held a long breath in my lungs and blew it out again, that made the soft rain drip from the clouds, that made the earth drink it in instinctively, that made the shrubs whisper to its falling and give out the odours of dampness and growth. Step by step, as I went over the lawn, with my feet already dripping and my hair growing matted with the benediction of the falling rain, this impulse grew and grew. Before I knew it, from walking I had passed to running, before I knew it my coat was lying somewhere on the grass, and the rain fell thick and cool on my back and shoulders. Dim shapes of shrubs fled by me; then in front there sprang out of the dark the lines of a wooden fence bounding the lawn. This was taken in the stride almost, and the longer, coarser fibre of the meadow grass wrapped itself round my feet. Then a sandpan—a bunker guarding the eighteenth green of the golf-links—showed yellow in front, and next moment a flag waved to my right. Thereafter coarser grass again, and a

hundred yards beyond, the streamlet, where I have delved patiently with a niblick. Beyond, another fence, and in the field—out of bounds—large dark shapes of cows lying down. One underneath the shadow of a tree I stumbled against, leaving a snort and a stir behind, and I remember laughing at that. Then in due time a certain failure of wind, and a halt underneath a thin, young beech-tree with smooth, rounded stem. Next moment the trunk was between my knees, and between my arms strongly wound round it, my cheek against the bark, and, panting, I clung to it. It, too, was alive, and strong and hard, and with that, turning my head, I remember biting the bark, till strips of it came off and my lips bled. Then a bed of old brown bracken, and with my fingers I dug in the earth till I felt the buds of springing stems an inch below the ground.

There I lay, a minute it may have been, or ten years, and the climax, I must suppose, was reached. There was no more possible to me, the riddle was unsolved, and for the moment I knew it to be insoluble: not because it was a silly riddle, but

because it was no riddle at all, but the mystery of all mysteries—Life. As far as I personally could, I had done my best to answer it, not by thought, which is futile, but by being of the earth, by making myself one with growing things at the moment of spring-time, and this not, I do assure you, consciously, but because I had to. The current that ran through everything else ran through me also. I was a savage, an animal, what you will.

The greatest moment was over; again I was conscious of one slack arm hanging by my side, and one braced at the elbow to support my weight as I sat up. I knew that my feet were wet, that my hair had to be brushed from my eyes, that rain-drops fell from my eyebrows on to my face, that a torn, distracted, mud-covered blackness represented dress-trousers, that my coat was lying somewhere on the lawn, and that my bedroom window was an invitation to robbers. So I rose and walked back, slowly, and designedly slowly, in order to enjoy what I had not known. I had enjoyed before, but had simply taken. The cool rain was exquisite to the skin, so, too, the cool grass to the

feet; the night above and around was huge and solemn and ennobling. Thus the moral consciousness, I must suppose, awoke. I was filled with edifying thoughts. They would be dull if recorded; they were dull even then, for the memory of the savage moments was still hot as a dream.

Well, what then? There is no 'what then.' That wild running through the dark is flesh and blood of me. Perhaps you have no taste for cannibalism. That is a very comfortable defect.

The next twenty-four hours were, it is true, full of spring, but to me, licking the chops of my climax, they were jejune. My coat I picked up on the lawn; I entered through my window—no robber *could* have come in that sacred hour—gazed on the wreck of dress-trousers, and went to bed, and to sleep instantly and dreamlessly, awaking to a great bold sunlight that streamed in through the windows when my valet drew up the blinds. With him I held a shamefaced colloquy, as he gathered my dress-clothes.

'I'm afraid they're rather muddy,' said I, stifling my face beneath the sheet.

'Yessir.'

'Do they happen to be torn?'

A short pause.

'Yessir—torn in five places.'

'Well, see what can be done. Have I any more?'

'No, sir. Cold or hot bath, sir?'

Bath! That was a sitting in a tin pan and lifting teaspoonfuls of water on to one's spine; acrobatic performances to get wet, towel, huddling on of clothes.

'Oh, cold! Bring it in half an hour.'

For half an hour I half dozed, half thought of the performance of the night. I carefully considered the question as to whether I had gone mad, and decided—rightly, I believe—that I had not, though other people would say so.

Then after breakfast we went to play golf. Yes, I was right; the anticipation, the unfulfilled certainty was over; already small buds were red on the limes, and yellow on the elm. Spring had come, and we all talked about its delights. But none knew of mine.

Eventually the eighteenth hole was reached, after a game that I should normally consider exciting,

since my adversary and I were all square at the seventeenth. But this morning it struck me as colourless. Here, however, his second shot—full with the cleek—was short, and he went into the sandpan guarding the green, across which I had jumped in my outward journey, and walked through on my return. I stopped on the edge of the bunker, for I had warned him he could not be up, having myself played a full shot landing just over it. Upon which this accursed man took his niblick, and amid a shower of sand lay nearly dead.

'Curious,' says he.

Meantime I had been examining the sand, and saw there the trace of a bare foot.

'There's something much more curious than any shot of yours close by you,' said I. 'Look; do you see the trace of a naked foot close by you on the sand?'

He looked.

'By God,' he said, 'let me putt first.'

He missed it. So I had two for the hole and won.

MARCH

MARCH

I WONDER if any of those who perchance read this know of any formula, Christian, pagan, even Christian Scientist, which insures, or has any chance of insuring, decent habit of body or mind during an attack of lumbago. I have been trying my best in all three; that is to say, as a Christian I have tried to be cheerful, to wear a helpful sort of smile, and have said to myself, 'Think of the early Christian martyrs, the boiling oil, and the lions, and those horrors.' But myself has said to me, 'That was for a good cause; besides, they soon died.' Now, lumbago does not kill anybody, and, as far as I am aware, it is an invention of the devil. Thus Christianity failed to help me.

Then I tried paganism. In other words, I swore. It did not do the slightest good.

Then I tried Christian Science. I said: 'There is no such thing as pain—ow!—— Moral mind

refuses to recognise the existence of mortal mind. There is nothing material; all material is mortal mind, and there isn't any. Therefore I have no back, and consequently no small of it. It is all a false claim. Thus, as there isn't any, it is perfectly ridiculous to think I have a shooting pain there, for there is no such thing as either (i.) the small of my back, (ii.) pain, either there or anywhere else. I will therefore smile, and get up with a firm, brisk movement.' I did.

Oh, Mrs. Eddy! The false claim was more than usually clamant.

In fact, for two days I have felt myself such a martyr that I am now, happily, beginning to feel that I cannot possibly be a martyr at all. Nobody can conceivably have suffered such agonies as I have been thinking I suffered and survived. All the same——

I was riding down Davies Street on my bicycle two mornings ago, in the very best of health and spirits. Where Grosvenor Street crosses it, a fool of a cabman (though I had rung my bell) drove slowly across my path, and I had to dismount. I exchanged a pleasantry or two with him of a

bitingly high-spirited nature, and essayed to get on again. At that moment, so it seemed, I was stabbed in the back, and I heard the cabman say, 'Comin' over me like that, and drunk at this hour of the morning'—continuing, you will have seen, our previous conversation. Bad, untrue, unkind as it was, it was the last word, and so is entitled to a certain respect. But next time I see No. 24,304 I will see if I cannot give him lumbago. (This, evidently, is the pagan mood returning.)

Since that moment the joy of life has vanished. It—I cannot write the word again, and I will only remark that it sounds like a second-rate Spanish watering-place—has known my down-sitting and mine uprising, and has smirched my days. I have eaten no meat, I have drunk no wine, I have been incapable of taking part in all social and pleasant affairs. I was told that exercise was good, and went to skate at Niagara, and retired after one stroke with a cold-dewed brow. I was told a Turkish bath was good, and caught a cold in the head on the top of it. I was told not to think about it—this was the Christian Science

treatment, more or less—and the effect was that the Spanish watering-place thought the more of me. Only two hours ago, dressing for dinner—I dined alone in my horrid room — I dropped a sovereign on the floor, seriously considered whether it was worth picking up, and decided it was not. At that moment any tramp could have had it. Then by pure chance my servant came in, and I regained it. I was told to take Lithia Varalettes: the only effect, as far as I am aware, is that I am lowered for life. I even went so far as to see a doctor, who asked me whether I had done anything which might have produced a chill. Thank goodness, I had the face to say 'No.' In consequence he talked of the functions of certain internal organs; into these regions I did not attempt to follow him.

Now, all that I have written with regard to the second-rate Spanish watering-place is literally true. All the things which I am conscious of enjoying every day, such as reading, food, silly conversation, proper wine, violent physical exertion, cold baths, grew pale or impossible. But looking back even from the middle of it all—for to-night

it is, if anything, a little more acute—I begin to see that nothing on the whole matters less than physical pain. Once before in my life, when I was eight years old, I had bad earache, so my family assure me. Of that I can remember nothing whatever, except that in consequence I went to stay near Dartmouth for change of air. But of Dartmouth I remember much. There was an aloe in the garden, and one of its great fibrous leaves projected across the path, and was cut off. This had to be done by a strong gardener with a saw. A leaf cut by a saw! There were also rock pools in the estuary, with strawberry anemones —so we called them—waving in the water; steamers passed, visible through a telescope, that would go straight on, self-contained, unhelped till they reached America. *Ruta-muraria*, a small mean fern (I cannot even remember hearing its name except then), grew in crevices in the garden wall; it was rare, and began and ended my collection of ferns. That is what remains to me of the earache. Once again I had a tooth out. That was half a crown.

And now I have lumbago, and from analogy I

see that a fortnight hence, and a week hence (I hope), and a year hence, I shall remember nothing of it, except that for a few days I stopped indoors mostly, wrote notes of regret, and read a variety of delightful books. 'Jekyll and Hyde' I have read; I have quaked with Hyde, and shuddered with Jekyll: I have been down the Sambre canalized; I have been sucked under the fallen tree on the Oise; I have understood why Mr. Crummles deluded himself into thinking the Phenomenon was a phenomenon; I have admired the moral valour of Mrs. Nickleby when she convinced herself about the previous sanity of the gentleman in small-clothes and gray stockings; I have killed the Red Dhole from the Deccan, and have sat (a remarkable feat) with Princess Napraxine in a temperature of over 130° Fahrenheit. But for the lumbago, I should probably have done none of these delightful things. Also I have learned (I shall have to learn it again and again) that the moment is always tolerable. Even this tiny pin-prick of a pain can teach one that. 'Circumscribe the moment,' as Marcus Aurelius said. You can get along all right for the

moment (unless you die, and then the trouble is solved): why think of the moments to come? When they come, deal with them. And I hope that if I ever suffer from carcinomato-cerebro-spinal sciatica, I may think of that.

Besides—I must justify my conscience with respect to the doctor—I do not think it proved that my night adventure had anything to do with the lumbago. Thus, it would have been unfair to cast it, like bread on the waters, to a suspicious physician. And even if it had, it was well worth it. I would do it again to-morrow night, if the mood only could come again.

I wonder how the writing and the subsequent publication of any book, the meanest, affects the average author? No doubt the great powers in authorship, so to speak, care as little when another volume is launched as does the Empire at large when another battleship leaves the slips to join its mighty brothers. But for the majority—those of us, in fact, who hope some day (however vain-glorious the hope, we all cling to it) to produce a book which may rouse laughter or tears or interest twenty years hence—I imagine that there is scarcely

any excitement, depression, exaltation or misgiving that we have ever felt which is comparable to those attendant on the writing and launching of our little paper fleets. And as I have just launched another little paper boat to go and look after its drowned brothers, and the memory of all the emotions attendant on it is consequently keen, it may be of interest, in however small a degree, to others to read what even so uneminent an author as myself experiences in these times.

Birds, perhaps, give one the only simile possible for the first period. For the idea of the book, its scope, its aim, its plot, and, to a certain degree, its characters, all exist, in my case, before I put a word down on paper. When these are complete, we may say that the egg is there. The writing it, to my mind, is equivalent to the hatching only; but the definite production of the egg—of that which contains potential vitality—is over and complete at the moment the writing begins. If there is no potential vitality in it then, there never will be. When I begin to write, I am sitting on my egg.

Now, this first period—here we dismiss the simile of the egg, and take that of disease—lasts for a very ill-defined period. During it the patient is continually conscious of an abnormality of condition. His spirits are very variable: sometimes for days together the appetite will be good (mine always is), and the only symptom of the malady is a slightly increased vividness. Speech is coherent, but rather more fluent than usual; he tends to talk nonsense (this must not be confused with the subsequent wandering). Then, without apparent cause, stages of depression, irritability, and general peevishness ensue: he will decry his favourite pursuits, particularly authorship, and express audibly a desire for a large and settled income in Consols. Shortly before the crisis approaches (*i.e.*, the first dip of the pen in ink) a period of febrile excitement ensues; he will put sudden problems to his nurses as to how A would act given B, C, and D did so-and-so, and, whatever the answers given him, he will certainly take exception to them. This is the period of wandering alluded to above. Both the period of excitement previous to this and the period of

depression are marked by a certain listlessness with regard to other pursuits ; the patient takes nothing, except his malady, quite seriously, and though he performs the ordinary routine of life with correctness, he performs it somehow sub-aqueously. Indeed, he is never quite himself from the time the seeds of the malady first attack him.

All these symptoms are temporarily ameliorated when, to go back to our first simile, the egg is laid. For a time the nurses are encouraged to hope that the worst is over. Large quantities of what is known as 'sermon-paper' should be given without stint, and special care taken that there should be in every room, where the patient can possibly desire to sit, plenty of black ink and suitable pens. For a day or two he may refuse to go out altogether, or play any game, and here it is a mistake on the part of the nurses to urge him to do so. He may, in fact, be entirely left to himself. Probably these favourable symptoms will last for a week or two (during which the supply of sermon-paper should be renewed), and then a change for the worse comes over the

patient. The irritability returns, and with it an attack, more or less severe, of complete idleness and indescribable misgivings. He again expresses a wish for a settled income in Consols, and often goes suddenly to stay with his friends, or, if the disease is not so acute, merely lunches and dines out every day, and seems to fear being left alone. Then the malady becomes spasmodic, the periods of inaction alternate with periods of feverish industry, to which succeeds an attack of apparent coma with regard to everything except the disease itself, which is now confluent and completely encompasses him. A series of absolutely happy days ensue, accompanied by great mental activity and enormous consumption of sermon-paper. As soon as this definitely sets in, the nurses may make themselves quite happy for the time being. All fears of suicide may be considered over, and there is no allusion to Consols. And thus the egg is hatched in a blaze of hypertrophied glory.

It is hatched. That is to say, the MS.—such as it is—is complete, and personally one is completely happy for about a week. Then ensues a very tedious period, which is at times brightened

by finding that something is better than one thought, but oftener darkened by finding that something is worse than one thought. In other words, after a week of idleness, I sit laboriously down, and copy out the whole thing from beginning to end. Other patients at this point, I believe, use a typewriter, but personally, on the one occasion when I did so, I found that the corrections were not compassable even in triple-spaced type. So now, when the first MS. is complete, I begin from the beginning, and write the whole story out again. Chapters are often excised, and chapters (more rarely) inserted, since in my first MS: I find that I much more commonly say too much than too little. (Here is an opening for critics to point out how extraordinarily superfluous the first MS. must have been.) This period is the tiresome part of the hatching of the egg. The writing of the first MS., astounding though it may appear, was attended by a certain excitement: whereas the writing of the second is due to the desire, shall we call it? to catch one's self tripping, to detect, by the painful process of copying, one, perhaps, of the hundred absurdities

that one has committed. Yet there is a certain delight even in this, for since one would not set pen to paper at all unless one thought that one had an idea of some kind, it is mildly pleasant even now, when the first excitement is over, to see in cool blood what the idea was, to emphasize what appear to be its decent points, to suppress its bad ones. After that the second MS. goes to the typewriter, and peace again reigns.

Now, during the first writing of the MS. a curious thing has more than once happened to me; that is to say, a character, or a situation, or even the story itself, takes the bit between its teeth, and, as far as I know, bolts. One had meant to do and to say something different, but whether it is that even in the meanest-imagined character one, so to speak, raises the devil, and cannot be held responsible for his subsequent action, or whatever the cause, this phenomenon occurs. In the terms of our first simile, this is the cuckoo's egg in the hedge-sparrow's nest. One sits on the thing—writes it, that is—but it is not going to be a hedge-sparrow at all, but something quite different. This has happened to me more than once, in ——

and —— (my egotism does not go quite so far as to write the names of these obscure tales), I had definitely meant to give a different outcome. I had meant a character to be different in character, and thus to play another part. But writing I found it was not so. That character would go another way. And did. I followed faint but pursuing.

To resume. The MS. comes back from the typewriter's, and the sickening part of the work begins. In print, somehow, the degrading stuff looks even more degraded; for print, as Hazlitt said, in more senses than one, had he known it, 'print settles it.' What one suspected was rather sketchy and amateur becomes indubitably so. What one thought was somewhat workmanlike appears merely slip-shod carpentering, unplaned, out of line, with screws and nails not driven home. One taps here, one whacks there; one planes down, and finds one has planed too much; one planes down, and finds one has to plane more. One thinks—and this is, perhaps, the worst of all—that A rather resembles one's dear friend, John Smith, and ruthlessly takes all the stuff out of him, leaving an enfeebled marionette. Then, like a

pin-prick to a man on fire, come the inevitable typewriter's errors, necessitating reference to the MS. Some typewriters omit whole sentences, because they are not certain (no wonder); others rush in where angels fear to tread, with brilliant repartees of a sort undreamed of; others spell a name wrong throughout; others—and they are worse—spell it wrong occasionally. When I have time I will write an article on typewriters. They will not, after that, hold their heads so high.

Then comes the last step. When the typoscript (an awful word) has been corrected, and if necessary another made, and also corrected, the whole thing goes to the publisher, and in course of time come proofs. Proofs are of two kinds—galley proofs and page proofs. Galley proofs are interminable strips of paper which slide off one's desk, get mixed, and are altogether impossible. Page proofs, though depressing, are manageable, because they come in folded sheets of sixteen pages. Then once again are all weak points glaringly emphasized, the indescribable misgivings return with redoubled vigour, and invariably I long to live the last year, or whatever it may be, over again, in

order to have profited by my previous experience and do better. Usually at this stage—perhaps because I am used to it—the 'idea' does not seem to me so bad. It is only everything else that is wrong. Yet even then come sanguine moments. Quite suddenly I find myself thinking it is extremely good. How delicate, for instance, is the way in which Y behaves, how subtle and correct is Z's induction. Back swings the pendulum: over go these unstable ninepins.

There is probably a revise—there may be two—and the bread is cast upon the waters. As the date for publication approaches I feel ill. If I could, I would recall it all. One has felt a certain situation, or a certain character, keenly; was it not enough to have felt it, without throwing it, like early Christians, to the public? They will tear it into shreds, and probably refuse to swallow it.

But just then—when, in my experience, the darkest hour is on one, when one distrusts utterly all one has done, when one is afraid that that which is to one's self a chiefest joy of life is to everyone else just a mud-pie made by a child in a populous roadway, to be carefully stepped over

by three-quarters of the passers-by, to be stepped into by the remaining quarter, who, with a careless cuff to the maker of it, will pass on, remembering it only as they would remember some tiny untowardness in the menu at dinner—then comes quite suddenly the remembrance of an exceeding unexpected joy. A man or a woman, otherwise quite unknown to one, has on the last occasion of this kind thought it worth while to send a line, it may be a postcard only, to say 'thank you.' Once this 'thank you' arrived to me from New Zealand, and was accompanied by two frozen sheep bred on the reader's farm. The letter said, 'Please do not answer this, or you will think I am wanting an autograph.' Or, again, it may be just a press-cutting from a provincial paper, that shows me that someone whom I have never seen, and probably will never see, has understood something of what made me so happy when I thought of it. And that—unreasonably, perhaps—more than counterbalances the vituperation or the scorn of those who either do not or will not see. For a friend concerns me very much: an enemy, or, if that is too big a word,

an acquaintance to whom I am antipathetic, concerns me not at all. He is a negative quantity, and in this life of ours the negative quantities do not matter, for the man who has one friend is infinitely better off than the man who has no enemies and a million acquaintances.

Acquaintances! They are the bane and the absurdity of life, and especially of ordinary London life. How often has one heard it said, and, indeed, said one's self, 'Such a bore! I've got to go and call on So-and-so.' For if one finds it a burden to go and talk to anybody, for social reasons, it shows a very unbecoming conceit if one imagines that one's hostess will fail to find it a bore too. The custom, for instance, of calling after one has dined at a house is a very sensible and pleasant one, but it presumes that you have been dining with a friend. In this case the call will not bore you. But if the call bores you, it is probable that the dinner bored you too, in which case, unless you dined there for the sake of being fed gratis, why did you dine there at all? Again, a step further, how often have you exclaimed, 'What a bore! I've got to dine

with —— to-night.' And if you say that, you have no business to eat ——'s cutlet.

Of course, there is another side to the question—for questions with only one side to them have ceased to be questions at all—and that is, that at any such house you may meet a friend, or you may meet someone who will eventually become a friend. Then, I grant, it were worth while trudging there a hundred miles on foot, for from pole to pole, if you search the earth, you will find nothing better than a friend. How many have you? I have nine, and consider myself most fortunate. Or, again, you may find the very fact of meeting a certain number of people, though they are the barest acquaintances, stimulating, just as there are certain plants which thrive better with others of their species than alone. That, again, is a good reason: only when social etiquette demands a call of you, do not say, 'What a bore!' You have received a benefit: pay the current coin for it and don't grumble.

Now, this herding together of human beings with wealth and leisure into London for several months every year—there to meet their friends,

of course, but also a whole host of people who will never, and can never, be more than acquaintances—is a very curious modern phenomenon. London—in this sense of the word—was born not so many decades ago, and since then has grown, and is growing, in a manner perfectly amazing. There was a time, say eighty years ago, when London in this sense practically did not exist; the 'season' was enjoyed by those who now go to London in a dozen country towns, to which the rank and fashion of the country flocked, and there made gay on their native pavements. And, by all accounts, they *did* make gay. Then, by degrees, this remarkable monster of London began growing. People of leisure—or so I take it—began to weary of that priceless benefit, and in a couple of generations have turned themselves into perfect galley-slaves in the barque which they term, some of them mistakenly, 'Pleasure.' Means of travel got easier, quicker, and cheaper; more families every year, who had no business, either political or of money-making, took to going to London, where they found twenty theatres instead of one, a million people to move among instead of a

thousand. Intimacies, it is true, were less common there than in the friendly and less populous streets of their county town, but, instead, they might in the streets or at the houses of their acquaintances behold, in *propriâ personâ*, the man or woman with whose name at the moment the world was ringing ; or a new play claimed their attention and provided an easy subject of conversation—for conversation, unless they were people of brains, and many excellent folk are not, began, perhaps, to wear a little thin in the sixth week of their season at York or Winchester. But it would be impossible to be in London in the autumn or winter, during the months of shooting and hunting, and so, by common consent, the London season—a unique fact—was fixed for the months May, June, and July—a time when air in town is scarce, and suns are sultry, but a time in the country when Nature holds high festival, and all who have eyes to see and ears to hear are equally honoured at her banquet. But —and this could only happen in the Anglo-Saxon race, and it is symptomatic of the strength, and possibly, in years to come, of its weakness—Sport

said the final word. Half-fledged pheasants are not shootable, and foxes, that strange breed, which would have been exterminated long ago were it not for the ordinance that they shall be killed in one way only, were busy with the propagation of their species. And thus, though Nature spreads her feast, but sits alone at her empty board, she still has the last compelling word on the subject.

In fact, during the last half-dozen decades a new feverish and nervous disease has spread over England in a terrifying manner. We may call it Turbamania, or the passion for crowds, and, like the influenza, it attacks the upper classes more, it would appear, than the lower. No cure for it has yet been found, and it has not received, as a specific disease, the attention it deserves. This is curious: for in this inquisitive age, though it was a disease that only manifested itself in, let us say, slight redness of the little finger, and was perfectly harmless, we should probably by this time be possessed of a hospital for treatment of the cases, and dozens of savants squinting themselves purblind in the hope of discovering its bacillus. Many daily, and especially weekly,

papers have columns devoted to its symptoms, though they apparently do not know that they are speaking of it. But whenever I see that the Marquis of —— entertained the following distinguished company to dinner, I recognise Turbamania. For whom (except the sufferers from this distressing malady) can such an announcement concern? Not the diners, surely, for they were aware of it before. Nor, as far as I can see, those who were not asked, for the simple reason that they were not asked. Or who (except Turbamaniacs) care to hear how Lady —— was dressed? She herself, those who saw her, or those who did not see her? For the life of me I cannot tell. Yet how great must be the demand for such information, if we consider in what enormous quantities it is supplied! It must be read and looked for by thousands who do not know Lady —— by sight. Her mother, her sister, her daughter perhaps, if in India, might have gentle emotions raised by the knowledge of how she was dressed. But who else?

The theme is not worth consideration, except from my own standpoint, my own private view of

it, which at this moment occupies me enormously. Six months ago I decided to leave London, that most jealous of all mistresses, who exacts from us not merely our conscious thoughts, but pervades us in a way that no Cleopatra ever did yet. To anyone who has not known London the idea is unintelligible; to anyone who has, all explanations fall short of what he knows.

Think of it! Five million people, awake or asleep, round one—five million, each of whom is as important to himself as I to me, stealing about like thoughts in the brain of this busy city, intent, alert, as are no other five million people in the world. My God! how I love the sense of it! how each street is to me a room, a passage, in a great house to which I have but lately succeeded, and is crammed with treasures, some few of which I know by sight, but of which as yet I do not know the thousandth part. What are they? Men and women, that is all; and is that not enough?

What is it? What is it, I vainly ask myself, that stirs me so? Me, who know unconsciously the drone of the four-wheeler as it passes up this

huge beating artery of life, and, without distraction of thought, can distinguish it from the quick cloop-cloop of the hansom, and can recognise the boom of the omnibus, and divine the meaning of a hundred noises in the street without raising my eyes or losing the thread of what I am doing. Life, jostling, vulgar, crowded, commonplace (God forgive me!) life. Oh, how excellent! I do not look at the placards of the latest news; I look at the seedy man who carries them about like a plaster on his usually weak chest. How can I convey it all? The wet asphalt of the roadway, the streaked mud of the roadway, the smell of the Twopenny Tube, the reek from the restaurant next door, the reprints of Cosway in the shop-window adjoining, my own door with a circling lock, which is always upside down to my key. What does it all mean to the person who does not know what it means? and what can that which I say mean to the person who does know?

Yet, drunk as I am with crowds (here indeed is Turbamania), I propose to-morrow to go forth to a house in a sleepy county town, where no

one is ever in a hurry, though many have the impression that they are, and there are oiled wheels of existence continually gently turning, which, as far as I know at present, find no particular grist, instead of these grating, roaring, spinning fly-wheels of the world. There is a hotel bus there, and no hansoms; no vomiting of crowds from embowelled stations, no—no anything, as it seems to me this moment, except—and this is in the main the reason for which I go—there is as much time there as in London (all the time there is, in fact), and less to do in it. I want, in fact, to arrive at a greater simplicity of life than seems to me possible in London, to get into what I believe to be more normal and healthy conditions, instead of living an existence which, however delightful and absorbing, is yet slightly feverish. I want to get out of the habit of thinking of the next delightful thing I am going to do in the course of the one which I am doing, and so largely missing its point—not to be in a hurry, not to clutch so much at pleasures.

Also, in spite of my passion for crowds, I have desired all this last year, with a haunting intensity

which I cannot hope to convey, to watch the bursting of the spring, to see it mix into the great triumph of the summer, to follow step by step the fruition of the sun, and, to round the perfect circle, see the accomplished and completed year fall to sleep again in the arms of winter—the year which, since the beginning of time, has been waiting among the crowds of the uncounted centuries for its turn to give to the sons of men sweet and bitter, ecstasy, and life and death, as God has ordained.

APRIL

APRIL

I HAVE been here nearly a month without spending a single night away—that in itself is a sign of improvement, for I suppose (to my shame I own it) that it must be years since I have slept thirty consecutive nights in the same bed. And what I believe is a greater sign of improvement is that I have not wanted to go away, and I do not want to go away. I like these level, uneventful days: these mornings of work, followed by a few hours of out-of-doors, and in the evening 'the face of a friend,' in this house or another. How dull I should have thought it, not long ago; how antipodal to dull I find it!

I said 'uneventful' just now—that was a mistake. I have been through fiery trials, in the shape of a cook, who could not only not cook decently, but could not cook at all. In any case, she didn't, and I have eaten raw flesh on the altar of rusticity.

Then there was a personage who represented herself as a charwoman. Though I cannot say she was a housebreaker, she was certainly nearer that than anything else; for though she did not actually break the house, she broke everything inside it. She began 'cleaning,' as she called it, before it was yet day, and till nightfall the house was resonant with fracture. When there was nothing left to break, she upset her washpail over anything that came handy, brocade for choice. She upset, also, permanganate of potash, with which I was staining a floor, over a green carpet, and one evening I found her eating asparagus (my asparagus, too!) in the scullery. Thereupon I said 'Board-wages,' and it is my belief that she simply added board-wages to her ordinary diet, which she ate at my expense. Otherwise, there is no possible way of accounting for the fact that a sirloin of beef, which had come in in the morning—— Enough! She is gone.

Stevenson recommends weeding and cacao-seed planting as a suitable pursuit for anyone who thinks he can make his living out of writing 'measly yarns.' But now I have one advantage over that divine author: I know a far better

employment. It is to paint floors with permanganate of potash (otherwise known as Condy's fluid; but you can get much more of it for your money, though it is cheap anyhow, if you buy it in the raw). For a shilling you get enough to stain all the floors in your house (unless you live in an exceptionally large one) the most beautiful brown. The very process reminds one of the scene of the powder-mixing in 'Jekyll and Hyde.' It is laid on dark purple; before your eyes it changes to a livid angry green, and while yet it is wet it becomes a dark brown. You lay it on with a large paste-brush, and feel you are saving money. Incidentally you get a quantity on to your hands, and it is apparently indelible. Then you rub it with beeswax, and your deal floor becomes positively ancestral. A few Persian rugs on the top bring you back from a villa to the gorgeous East.

But even before I stained the floors I bought seeds, and planted sweet-peas and nasturtiums broadcast, also (these in seedlings) Jackmanni,* and tropæolum and tobacco-plant, and two Crimson Ramblers. Then, on a day to be marked with red in the annals

* Purple clematis.

of scarification, I took a trowel and a pocket-knife, and went into the highways and hedges to cut standards for rose-trees. But I took no gloves. *Hinc illæ lacrimæ.* Anyhow, I cut seven standards. This is the way *not* to do it.

I started cheerfully along an unfrequented lane. Larks hovered trilling: spring was bursting in numberless buds, and the green mist of leaves hung round the hedgerows. Before long I saw in the hedge by which I went a suitable standard. It was rather inaccessible, but the lust of the gardener burned in me, and I took a sort of header into the hedge. A shoot from the coveted standard playfully retained my cap, another took one arm in keeping, a third gently fixed itself to my left hand. That had to be very carefully disengaged, since the thorns were encompassing it, and in disengaging it I dropped the trowel. An incautious recovery of the trowel drew the first blood. Then I began.

It is necessary in cutting a standard to get a piece of real root. This particular standard, however, seemed to have no particular roots. It went on and on below ground without object, so far as I could judge; infirm of purpose, it could not

begin. When it did begin, it was already mixed up with a bramble, the thorns of which were set on the parent stem on a perfectly different principle, and I did not want the bramble. But, with a totally undeserved popularity on my part, the bramble wanted me. It got me—in pieces which I hope were no use to it; and I began to see that, under certain circumstances and to a certain extent, as Mr. Gladstone might have said, gloves were, if not necessary to human life, at any rate a protective agent against possibly fatal hæmorrhage. Just then the root began.

I destroyed the bramble, root and branch; I destroyed a hazel (branch), and I destroyed the standard (root). That was all at present.

Clearly this would not do: I was as far from standards as ever, but I was bleeding like a pig. So I went home, got some gloves, and became successful. But to be successful in a tale of adventure is to become dull, and with a view to avoiding this as much as is possible, short of not writing at all, I will merely say that I cut seven standards on that divine afternoon, and—but that I can't sing—went home singing.

The cat next door, so it appeared, had observed the planting of the Jackmanni with a disapproving eye, and even as I went into the garden with my seven standards (like a Roman Emperor) I saw a stealthy form moving slowly away from the corner where I had put one of them. Now, I know something about cats, though nothing, it appears, about standards, and, without the least hurry, I walked into the garden and said 'Poor puss,' and saw, out of the corner of my eye (I dared not look honestly round for fear 'Poor puss' should see), that my Jackmanni was entirely disinterred, and a scurry of freshly-dug earth lay round it. There were therefore two courses open to me: either the direct, which lay in taking the cat, which (with the shallow diplomacy of its species) had advanced towards me, straight to the disinterred Jackmanni and there slapping it, or the subtle course. I chose the subtle. The cat was a knave—I knew that perfectly well—I chose to be the knave set to catch it. So I said 'Poor puss' again, and went to the uprooted Jackmanni and planted it again in the sight of 'Poor puss.' Then I went slowly indoors, a very Bismarck.

Once arrived inside, I flew to the lumber-room, and with feverish hands unearthed a large garden squirt, and, filling it with cold water (I wish it had been iced), flew to what we may call the wing of the house—it consists merely of a bootroom, which commands, strategically speaking, the Jackmanni. The window was open, and with great caution I advanced to it and looked out. Already, once more that very stupid knave of a cat was busy in the bed. I took careful aim, and the cold water drenched the knave. I will teach it—at least, I think I have taught it—that I do *not* plant Jackmanni merely to give it a few moments' senseless amusement. Besides, to-morrow I shall have a fox-terrier; so the garden squirt was the kindest sort of cruelty.

I am afraid that, in talking thus vaguely of 'the house' and 'the garden,' the reader may have formed a totally erroneous impression of scale, and I must inform him at once that 'the house' is the kind of house which is called The Cedars, because, apparently, it has one withered furze-bush in the garden. It is semi-detached, stands on the outskirts of the town, and is of an external

appearance which is better forgotten. Inside, however, the rooms are good, high and airy, and, anyhow, it suits me. There is a small strip of garden in front, in which at present I take no interest, and a square of garden behind measuring some sixty or seventy feet by thirty, encompassed by a wall of old and very large brick. A strip of border, sown from end to end with sweet-peas, runs up one side. At the far end is a small raised terrace of grass, on which grow an apple-tree and a plum-tree, by which I have planted the Crimson Ramblers. The seven standards, to be budded in June, stand in a formal row below the terrace, and parallel to the border of sweet-peas stand half a dozen tubs, in which are sown nasturtiums of the large climbing kind. This leaves a space of grass, twenty feet by forty, and on this is being now erected 'the shelter,' a wooden room with trellis on two sides, match-boarding on one, and entirely open on the other. Felt will be laid down over the grass, and over the felt rugs. There will be a couple of basket-chairs there, an old French mattress covered with rugs, a writing-table, and a small dining-table, with four

chairs. There I propose to live as soon as the summer comes. Over one side the nasturtiums in the tubs will trail their green and ruddy arms, and I shall look towards the seven standards and the Scarlet Ramblers. In the evening an Arab lamp with electric light, brought on a long cord from the house, will illuminate it.

The very planning of 'the shelter' was an absorbing joy; absorbing, too, is it to see it rise, smelling clean of freshly-chiselled wood. Then it will be painted green, and ready for habitation. In front of it, towards the terrace, will stand a sundial, which will not get, as far as I can see, any sun at all, since the stately shelter will entirely shade it. However, I dare say it will do better in the shade, like lilies of the valley. Besides, one never uses a sundial in order to tell the time.

I often wonder how large an area of house and garden it is possible to get really fond of. The fact of broad acres and limitless corridors may be, and often is, delightful to the possessor, especially if they are of long-standing possession; but to be fond of a place in the way that I mean implies

to be intimate with every square inch of it. Your own niche, your own particular *angulus terræ*, must, I think, be small; the great reception-rooms, the huge lawns, are delightful to have, but you will often find the owner of such choosing a small room for himself to work in and live in, and making perfect, according to his own taste, some sequestered angle of his garden, shut out from vastness, and brought within the scope of his invention. The great lawns and shrubberies he may plan and take pleasure in, but he will not be fond of them with the personal affection he feels for his own room, his own garden corner. And it is the personal aroma, the definite impress of an individual taste on rooms and gardens, that makes them alive with their own individual entity: they are parasitic, like mistletoe, drawing their life from a parent stem. The large rooms, the rows of marbles, the acres of signed canvas, are beautiful and wonderful things; but no one man can appropriate them and fashion them to himself, or himself to them, for they are too large, and are the setting not for one person, but for the brilliant crowd. But his own 'den,' where he

has the books he wants, the chair he likes, the few pictures he loves, it is there that he is *chez lui*—at home. That is the good part; to have the other is enviable, no doubt, but one does not envy it with the sense of need. Of course, no two people may have the same idea of a *chez lui;* and it is always with a certain anxiety that one awaits the arrival of a friend who has not seen one's own. He may easily not like it at all (as I have said, the appearance of the house outside is among the things to be forgotten), and if he does not, it is part of me he does not like. But it takes all sorts to make a world; if it were not so, the world would be infinitely less entertaining than it is and infinitely less lovable.

Almost exactly opposite my windows is an old graveyard, the stones in which are for the most part mossed and gray. A gravel path winds in and out of the sleeping-places of men long dead, and round it stand a half-dozen of fine elms. It borders on the road, and is separated from it by only a low paling. And looking out of my window this morning, I saw here one of those very simple little common things that give the

lie to cynics. It was a fine sunshiny morning and the road was populous, and among others there came down it two big, strapping privates out of the regiment that is stationed here, all trappings and scarlet, while between them, with a hand in the arm of each, walked a little old lady dressed in black. Each of the two men carried a cross of white flowers, and they walked very slowly, hanging on their steps, and suiting their pace to the woman. All three passed in at the cemetery gate, and went across the grass to a tomb which lay underneath the elms, and had an old weatherworn stone to mark it. On it the two soldiers laid down their crosses, and took off their forage-caps, and all three knelt side by side for a couple of minutes, it may be, at the foot of the grave, close by the road. Then they rose, and the old lady kissed her tall sons very tenderly, and stood with them there a minute more, a hand clasped by each, while they talked together, I suppose of the dead. Then they passed out of the cemetery gate again, and, for aught I know, out of my life. But a little later I went across the road, and to the grave where the crosses of

lilies lay. The stone, as I had seen, was of old standing, and I read that it was in memory of a man who had died in the year 1880, on April 17, so that to-day was the twenty-second anniversary of his death. Two days afterwards I happened to ask the Colonel of that regiment whether there were two privates of a certain name among the men.

'Yes,' said he, 'excellent steady fellows; they look after their old mother, who lives here.'

So the reconstruction was simple enough. The father must have died while the two sons were still boys of five or six; yet on the anniversary of his death, so it seems, they still go to the grave with their mother, quite simply and naturally, and say a prayer there with her. The grass, too, on the grave itself was, I noticed, kept short and carefully tended, so I suppose they go there not infrequently. I think the man who lies there must have been a good husband. God keep all our memories as green in loving hearts!

Meantime April is here, and it is good to be in England, for in no other country that I have ever seen is the rush of colour more jubilant.

Flowers you may get in plenty on the Grecian hills when 'blossom by blossom the spring begins,' but nowhere do you get such green as that in which here April hangs the trees and hedgerows. Star-like the pink petalled daisies shine in the grass of the water-meadows, and soon the yellow shower of buttercups will make Danaë of the earth. In lonely places the daffodils dance together for the joy of their renewed life, and the warm wind shakes the snow of almond and apple-blossom on to the thick-bladed turf. Morning by morning fresh spears of living stuff have pierced the earth, rising upwards in obedience to the great law that moves all life, to look on the kingdom of the sun ; and every day the sap of growth hums and tingles to the end of twig and tree, bursting forth through pink-sheathed bud into stars and crescents of leaf and blossom. On the great downs the grass of last year already shows gray and withered by the newness of the excellent emerald, soon to be wrought with tapestries of thyme, where the bee scrambles heavy-legged with the pollen of its fragrant labour, and the chimes of the harebells, to which, so the legend of the countryside has it,

the fairies dance, leaving a deeper green where their feet have trod.

Brimful from bank to grassy bank the chalk-streams drawn from the cool deep brain of the downs hurry steadfastly through the meadows, setting the reeds quivering and jerking. Here their courses lie over beds of white chalk and gravel, each pebble shining lucently, jewel-like; here the water-weeds, growing thickly from bank to bank, are combed and waved by the passage of the water; here the stream is set on a more industrious and earnest purpose, as it twirls itself together in the bricked and narrowed passage that leads to the melodious thunder of a mill, from which, having accomplished its work without any loss or fatigue, it emerges in a soda-water of bubble from the dripping sides of the sluice and the mist of its own outpouring. There in the pool below lie its great mysterious citizens, the aldermen of the river, for whom on many days I shall, with my heart in my mouth, cast flies upon the water. Think, if I should catch the Lord Mayor himself—an eight-pounder at least, so the miller tells me, who has broken as many lines, it appears,

as there are bubbles in the stream, or heads of racing thistledown in a windy meadow. And if, as is highly probable, the lord of the stream defends his own, and will put such slight wisdom into the heads of his fish that not even the least cautious stripling among them is lured by me, yet he cannot wean me from that fond hope that this cast or this will meet its reward, or when evening comes, and the creel is still unburdened, take away from me the benefit of those waterside hours, the combing of the water-weeds, the translucency of sun-smitten ripples, the infinite refreshment of companionship with things that are quiet and alive. Nor at the end of the day will my machinations against his citizens debar me from becoming for a moment one of them, and dividing the frothy waters of his deepest pool.

MAY

MAY

MAY has come in with gleams of sunshine and gusty fits of tears : half the time that one is out-of-doors, one is being soaked ; the other half, being dried by the sun and the boisterousness of west wind. The heavens, indeed, are like some wayward woman, scolding and stormy, then suddenly showing the divinest tenderness. 'I didn't mean it,' say the sun and the west wind. 'I only wet you for fun. Oh, don't go indoors and change ; I will make you quite dry in a minute.'

But for as long as I live, I think, every May that comes round in the circle of months will be to me, not the May of the year whose course is now running, but the May of three years ago. So, too, when we come to June, you will find the June of two years ago. For to me now, and to me always, as I think, May will mean the things that happened then, and June will mean the things

that happened thirteen months later. I will tell you that story. It concerns three people only, and two of them are dead.

Dick Alington and I were very old friends: we had been at school together, and his father's house was next to ours in the country, the woods belonging to each running contiguous, separated only by the park paling. In consequence, from our frequent passages the one to the other, a beaten track lay through the woods in a bee-line from house to house, and the paling at the particular point where the bee-line crossed it, was, from the frequent scrambling over it, broken and splintered, till after the lapse of some years it was no more than a stile, that could be walked over without any scrambling at all, and the path was known as the 'boys' path.' We had remarkably kindred tastes, because we both of us liked practically everything except parsnips and being indoors, even down to London fogs, when we used to have games of hide-and-seek in Berkeley Square—where we also both lived—which for sheer mysterious excitement beat any pursuit in which I have ever been engaged, either before or since. The game itself is one of the

utmost simplicity. I stood in the porch of either house while Dick was given ten seconds' law. He had then, without leaving Berkeley Square, to remain uncaught for five minutes, while I pursued him blindly in the fog. We were not allowed to run nor to hide, but only to walk about the square, and we were properly dressed with tall hats and gloves, so that in case of the fog clearing rapidly we should appear respectable. Of course, for the whole of that five minutes we were both utterly lost, and the hider was usually caught by walking straight into the seeker. Hence the excitement: the pursued guiltily sneaked aside from every figure that loomed through the fog, the pursuer eagerly peered at such, to vanish precipitately again if this was not his quarry, to merely annex it if it was. At the end of the five minutes, if the pursued was yet uncaught, both returned —if they could find it—to the house from which they set out, and pursued and pursuer changed rôles.

I have not, indeed, yet heard of the employment with which we did not amuse ourselves, and we ranged from birds' eggs to carpentering, from chess to squash-rackets, from football to the writing

of Tennysonian lyrics, with equal fervour. We also revived the pentathlon as follows: Dick won the toss and said 'Golf,' and I retorted with 'Tennis.' He then chose the hundred yards and I croquet. The odd event was, of course, selected by the winner of the toss. Two games were barred, namely, single wicket at cricket, because we neither could ever get the other out, and long-jump, because Dick could jump just about twice as far as I. The whole pentathlon had to be decided on one day, so that staying powers counted for something.

Then a stormy day would come, too bad for man or beast to be abroad in, and we had pentathlons of the intellect, playing chess, draughts, back-gammon, the poetry-game, and Halma in feverish succession. Here, too, games at cards were barred, because of Dick's strange inability to grasp the hang of any card-game whatever. He merely fell asleep over them, so that made it quits in the matter of the long-jump; in fact, the balance was in my favour, since there is only one long-jump, but there are many games of cards, and I could have named all the events of which I had the call from among them.

So from school we passed out into life. Dick went into the army, and I took up as a profession the work on which I am at this moment engaged. We had many mutual friends, and there never came, as long as Dick was alive, any break in our intimacy ; nor, until a certain day, did we either of us, as far as we were aware, grow any older. The pentathlons continued with unabated fervour, and I should be ashamed to say now how old we both were when we last played hide-and-seek in Berkeley Square. It would appear hardly credible to any serious and right-minded person, while those who did believe it would be filled with contempt for us; and, as it is bad to be contemptuous, I will not mention the ages.

Now, there had always been in our lives a third person, a girl rather younger than either of us, a neighbour both in town and country and a distant cousin of Dick's. For years Dick and I had liked Margery, but had necessarily despised her because she was a girl. Then there succeeded years when we had begun to be men, not boys, and Margery not a girl, but a woman. The contempt ceased (that was so kind of us), and we

three formed what I may call an alliance of laughter. Margery was always present at the pentathlons, acted as umpire in case of dispute, and was even allowed to join in them herself. Then quite suddenly I became aware that I had fallen in love with her. And it was in this manner I knew it :

It was at the conclusion of the golf item in the pentathlon, and on the eighteenth green. Dick had holed out his last putt and won from me. He had also won from Margery, and Margery had a long putt of ten yards to halve with me. She looked at it for some time. She was standing with her back to the sun, so that her brown hair was flushed and gilded with it ; her eyes, very blue and vivid with thought, were intent on the line to the hole, her mouth was a little drooped, and the white line of her teeth showed below her lip.

Suddenly she said, 'Yes, I see,' and putted.

The ball travelled smoothly along the turf, and she threw her arms wide.

'It's going in,' she cried. '*What* a darling !' and as the ball dropped into the hole she looked up at me. Then something caught in my breath,

and it was no longer the Margery that I knew that stood there, but She. She who was completion and perfection—woman to me a man.

For a time the old intimacy of the alliance of laughter went on externally, I suppose, as before. I think we laughed no less. We contested as many pentathlons. We made plans for every day of Dick's leave, and usually abandoned them for subsequent improvisations. Then, not more than a week afterwards, there came a day when Margery had to go to town, and Dick and I were eft alone. She was coming back in the evening, and we were to go to the station to meet her, have tea there, and ride our bicycles back over the ridge of Ashdown Forest, down home in time to be exceedingly late for dinner.

The afternoon was very hot and sultry, and Dick and I abandoned the game at tennis we had begun, for we were both slack and heavy-handed, and strolled through the woods up the 'boys' path' for the coolness and shelter of the beech-trees. The ground rises rapidly near the broken paling, and, finding a suitable bed of bracken, we lay down and smoked, looking out from cover

over the great ridge of gorse and heather that stretched below us. The air was full of the innumerable murmurs of a hot day, and a warm heathery smell hung idly on the air. Near at hand was a flaming bank of gorse, and as we lay there, far more silent than our wont, we could hear the popping of the ripened seeds. The birds, too, were very silent in the bushes; only the grasshopper chirped unweariedly in the grass. Dick, I remember, was cleaning his pipe with yellow grass-stems, his straw hat tilted over his eyes. I, though lying there, was in reality waiting for the train at Victoria, No. 6 Platform. It started in five minutes, and had two hours' run before it. Then Dick sat up.

'Look here,' he said: 'I've something to tell you. There's no doubt about it—I've fallen in love.'

I think I knew, almost before he spoke, what he would say; certainly before he spoke again I knew what was coming.

'Yes, Margery,' he went on: 'my God! I have fallen in love.'

He turned his brown eyes suddenly from the hot reeling landscape in front to me.

'Why, Jack,' he said, 'what's the matter? You look queer, somehow.'

'Dick, are you—are you sure?' I asked.

'That you look queer?'

'No—that you have fallen in love with Margery?'

'Sure? You'll be sure enough when you do the same. There's no mistake about it, I can tell you. Why, Margery is the whole point of the pentathlons now.'

'She has been so to me for the last week,' said I.

Dick said nothing for a minute. Then, below his breath, 'What do you mean?' he asked.

'That you and I are in the same boat,' I said.

'How long have you known this?' he asked.

'A week yesterday.'

'And you didn't tell me.'

'No; I couldn't. It has been too wonderful to speak of. I'm made like that. I should have told you, though, before long.'

'Have you spoken to Margery?' he asked. 'No, of course you haven't.'

'No; I haven't spoken to anybody.'

Dick got up.

'Come away,' he said. 'I don't like this place. And what are we to do?'

I looked at my watch.

'Start for Braceton at once,' I said, 'or the train will be in before we get there.'

Dick put his arm in mine.

'I say, Jack,' he said, 'whatever happens, we'll behave decently, won't we?'

'Yes, probably,' said I.

'That's all right, then. We must talk this over to-night. It must simmer a bit before we can get used to it. Don't let us say another word about it now.'

So we rode off through the heat to Braceton, found the train already in, and Margery waiting for us on the platform, looking, for all the oppressive stagnation of the day, like some nymph of Grecian waterways. And Dick and I looked thirstily on her, but feared to meet each other's eye, for life and love were in the balance, and we were friends.

That evening, when the others had gone to bed,

we sat on in the chairs that had been taken for coolness out of the smoking-room on to the lawn. The odour of the hot summer night hung heavily, and nothing stirred in the windless air, except that from time to time a faint ghost of a tired breeze whispered from the bed of tobacco-plant, and brought with it a waft of the thick scent.

The sky had grown overcast, and from a bank of cloud which rose slowly in the west the fires of lightning flickered, and a drone of distant thunder answered. In the rooms downstairs the lights were already put out, but the bedrooms above showed illuminated squares of blind. Nearly opposite us was Margery's room, and now and then her shadow crossed it. Then that light was put out, and presently afterwards we heard the scream of the blind updrawn, and at the open window through the darkness her white figure glimmered dimly.

We could neither of us move nor speak, and in the silence I remember hearing the creak of Dick's shirt grow more rapid as his breathing quickened. Then, in a bush close at hand, a nightingale suddenly burst into bubbling song—

no lament, as the Greeks thought it, but the lyric passion of mating-time, when the stir of love goes through the world, and the lion seeks the lioness, and the Libyan hills re-echo to the roaring of his irresistible need; when the feathered and bright-eyed birds lie breast to breast in their swaying habitations; when the man seeks the woman, and cannot rest till he has found her.

Then a flash of lightning, somewhat more vivid, lit up for a moment the lawn and the house, and she must have seen us there, for from her window came a little stifled exclamation, and before the thunder answered she was gone.

'The storm is coming up,' said Dick. 'Let's go indoors, and talk there. Besides, I'm as dry as dust, and I want a drink. We'll go upstairs; all the lights are out down here.'

Our rooms were next each other, communicating by a door, and, drawing our chairs up to the window for coolness, we sat down.

'Somehow or other we've got to settle it now,' said he—'settle it, that is, as far as we are able.'

How long we talked I do not know, but before we had finished we had to shut the window, for

the storm came nearer, and burst round us in sheets of heavy rain and violet fires of lightning. Then it passed, and still we sat there, till at the end the moon came out, and rode high in a clean-washed heaven, with the stars clustering round her like swarming bees, while to the east the sky grew dove-coloured with the first hint of dawn. At last I rose.

'It remains, then, just to toss,' said I, and spun a coin.

'Heads!' said he.

'It is. You speak to Margery first, then,' I said.

He got up too, irresolute, and we looked at each other gravely, rivals in that which makes life sweet, but friends. And that makes life sweet, too.

'And whatever happens, Jack,' he said rather huskily, 'we will do our very utmost not to let this stand between us, and to keep all knowledge of it from her.'

'Yes, whatever happens,' said I. 'Time to go to bed, Dick. Good-night.'

I went into my room, closing the door of com-

munication; but before I was half undressed it opened, and Dick came in.

'One thing more,' he said: 'we didn't settle when.'

'That must be left to you,' said I; 'but oh, Dick, for God's sake let it be soon! Surely it had better be soon.'

His face lit up with the unimaginable light of love.

'Yes; the sooner the better,' he said.

I slept long and late that night, from the mere exhaustion, I suppose, of thought and suspense; did no more than turn and sleep again, when I was called; and woke finally to find it was after ten, and the calmness of the promise in the dawn had been fulfilled by a perfect day of unclouded blue. I went through into Dick's room, but he had already dressed and gone down, and even as I passed the window I saw him and Margery come from the conservatory and out on to the lawn, surrounded, as was her wont, by a wave of dogs. But this morning it seemed that Dick had no word for any of them; and thus they passed out of sight behind the bushes. I knew as surely as

if the thing had already happened that Dick would have something to tell me when they came back, but what that should be I had no kind of idea. We three had played like children together for years: had Margery her secret, even as Dick and I had had? Or had she none? Were both of us her playmates?

It cannot have been very long before Dick came back, for I was still in the dining-room, staring blankly at the morning paper, with my breakfast yet untasted. As soon as I saw him I knew.

'So it is you,' I said, and stopped. Then our compact and our friendship aided me. 'Oh, make her happy, Dick!' said I.

The dear man sat down on the edge of the table.

'Jack, I'm cut in two about it all,' he said, and never have I seen so intense a happiness on the face of living being. 'Really I am. Oh, damn it all! And Margery told me to come and tell you, and she wants to see you. She says she'll see you alone first, and then we'll all play the fool together, as we've always done. So I

had to lie to her. First thing I did was to lie to her, and I told her that you were not particularly fit this morning—thunderstorm kept you awake—and that I didn't know if you'd be up to a pentathlon.'

He broke off suddenly.

'My God, if it only wasn't you!' he said.

I remember feeling then as if I was a piece of mechanism external to myself. This mechanism saw Dick sitting on the edge of the table, saw breakfast waiting and ate it, and spoke and moved in obedience to an instinct that seemed to have nothing to do with me. Behind somewhere sat Me, watching what went on.

'No; a pentathlon by all means,' said the tongue of the mechanism. 'We've got to have one more to settle the last, and you go back tomorrow. It begins with croquet. Margery chose that.'

Dick's eyebrows suddenly grew into a frown, and he bit his lip.

'Oh, Jack!' he said.

Then for a moment I took possession of the mechanism.

'It's no use talking,' I said. 'The thing is so, and all I can do at present is to behave with some semblance of decency—anyhow, so that Margery shall not know. I can manage that perfectly, and it will give me something to do. It's no use your being sorry for me. Besides, it's not humanly possible for you, nor would it be for me if I was in your place, to have sorrow predominant. Margery fills the world for you—she does for me——'

'No, not fills it,' said he. 'You don't understand——'

'I understand perfectly. You're a decent sort of fellow, and—well, I am your friend. It's no manner of good talking about it. All we settled last night I feel fully—fully! Do you understand? I can only assure you it is so. Whatever happens—do you remember saying that? I do, and—oh, for God's sake, don't worry!'

Dick got off the table, turned his back to me, and blew his nose very long and loudly, and, drawing up a chair, sat down by me with a quivering lip.

'I've made a fool of myself, I suppose,' he said,

'and I've done not a particle of good, but only made it harder for you. That's like me. I'm happier than I thought it was allowed for a man to be, and I'm wretcheder than I hoped was permitted. That's all; there was no need to say it, because you knew it. But I had to.'

Then again the mechanism moved, and I sat and watched. And now I find it is quite easy to write down what happened, for I only watched. But it was hard to write down what happened when, as on the last page, I was doing it myself. If you think of it you will see it must be so.

'Where is Margery?' I said. 'Oh, Dick, don't be a fool!'

Again he blew his nose.

'Out in the garden,' he said. 'Are you going now?'

'Yes. The pentathlon begins in ten minutes. Nothing has happened. Just the pentathlon!'

I walked out of the dining-room, leaving him still there, into the blinding blaze of sunshine. She—the She—was sitting in a chair at the end of the lawn, and my mother beside her. The latter got up as I came near.

'You have heard?' she said; and in her beloved face there was that look which I have seen three or four times in my life, when great sorrow or great joy has brought us into that union which, so I verily believe, can only exist between mother and son. I knew that she had guessed what unspoken word to Margery had been on my lips.

'Yes; Dick told me,' said I.

'Be a man, then,' said she, seeing that I knew that she knew. 'And God bless you, my darling, and comfort you.'

It was but a step to where Margery sat, and I held out both hands.

'Oh, Jack, I am so happy!' she said, and with that she rose on tiptoe, put her arms round my neck, and kissed me. It was all right, you see, that she should do that now, for she was my friend, and I was Dick's friend, and she loved Dick.

* * * * *

There is but little more to say about that May, since even in a diary one has to avoid certain depths of egotism, in order to avoid being un-

bearable. The pentathlon was played, and I won. Also I had ten minutes with my mother that night, while Dick and Margery were together. Nothing much was said on either side, but I knew again, with the vividness that usually comes only with a thing heretofore unrealized, that she was my mother and that I was her son—part of her being, born from her body, indivisibly, while the ages lasted, hers. Hers was every little effort that I made towards ordinary hûman decency of behaviour; hers was the resolve I made then, and have tried (with how many failures!) to keep since, to realize that these things could not have happened with any but a benignant purpose, blind and incomprehensible as it might seem to me or to her; and that to become in the least degree embittered, or to fail in the smallest particle of friendship to my friend, or of love to the woman whom I loved, was to miss the Divine purpose, and to make of one's self a senseless animal. For then, and even now as I write, and do know the human outcome of that love, who knows now what the meaning and the great

purpose of all this is? A flaw, a failure—can one say that? Not so do I believe, for I *know* it is all a fragment of the circumference of that great circle, the centre of which and the whole of which—you and me, and the drunkard in the street, and the prostitute in the street, and summer rain, and love and death, are included, and none higher or lower than another—is God.

One word more; for the tired, puzzled entity which I know as myself turns back to the time when it was neither puzzled nor tired, and turned then in childlike faith to what never failed it, even as it now, mute, with its years of experience to back its childlike faith, turns to her whom it now knows can never fail it.

Mother, mother! I hope you are asleep, for this is an unseasonable and timeless hour of night, but I know that before you slept you prayed for your child. You prayed that God of His great grace would continue to keep him unembittered, for he humbly hopes that no touch of that has ever come near him because of what May brought; you prayed that the wound in his heart would be

healed, and your prayer was heard; you prayed that some day he would find his Margery—not she of whom June will tell you, for she was Dick's, but another—the one predestined in the eternal purpose of God.

JUNE

JUNE

THE early-planted sweet-peas are in flower; so, too, are the nasturtiums. It was Margery's plan always to sow seeds very early in the year; indeed, she was supposed to have been seen sowing in a snowstorm. Then she used to cover the earth up with matting if it was very cold, and uncover it for any glint of sun. Her gardening was of the most unorthodox order. She would pull up seedlings to see how their roots were getting on, disturb sown earth to see what was occurring below; if a plant looked sickly, she took it up and shook it, and replanted it again with a warning; but everything answered with her, and it was she who taught me to sow sweet-peas in March, so that you got the first flowers early in June.

The year after the events of this May, I remember, she sowed a long row of sweet-peas,

running right up from the house to the end of the garden. The garden was not a large one, any more than was the house, for she and Dick were not rich, and the whole row was not a hundred feet long. But there was a pleasant piece of lawn, with a thicket of lilac and syringa at one end, and on each side of the path she had placed old petroleum barrels, sawn in half, for flower-tubs. These she and I had painted green, and in the process had painted ourselves too, and everything tasted and smelt of green paint for a week afterwards. In these she planted nasturtiums and love-lies-bleeding, and both sweet-peas and nasturtiums were in flower early in June, just as mine are flowering now. She always loved sweet-peas. They gave her 'a feeling,' she said; therefore they grow thick in a certain place.

Dick and she had been married in the September of the same year when they were engaged. In October the Boer War broke out, and Dick's regiment was among the first to go out, and she and I went down to Southampton to see the *Maplemore* off. It was a bleak, gray day, with an angry, fretful wind which raised little ripples on

the water, and, as soon as raised, cut their heads off. There was a good deal of delay, and she did not sail for two hours after the advertised time, and we all three said openly to each other that we wished she would be quick. But when the time came I think that Margery would have given her life for half an hour more—had she known.

Then in December came the week which no one can think of even now without a shudder, when Stormberg was succeeded by Magersfontein, and Magersfontein by Colenso. But those wintry days passed, and the scars they left in many homes began to heal, and the year and the tide turned.

I saw Margery many times that spring, and I went to stay with her for two days on the 24th of May, for the 25th was the anniversary of her engagement to Dick, and she had long ago settled that we should spend it together. The 24th had been a very hot day, close and sultry, and by a curious coincidence late that night the storm which had for several hours flickered and grumbled in the west came very quickly closer, and burst over us in appalling riot. Sleep was out of the question,

and about two in the morning I got up and sat at the window watching it, thinking very intently of how just a year ago Dick and I had sat together through it, until the ivory calmness of the moon and the dove-coloured dawn had succeeded the tumult. Step by step I went through the talk we had had together, while overhead the violence of the storm abated and passed into the distance again. And whether I actually went to sleep or not I do not know, though in any case I was unconscious of having done so; but suddenly I heard Dick's voice, as I thought, close to me.

'And whatever happens, Jack,' he said.

Then, whether I had been asleep or not, I was awake now, and alone. Outside a moon rode high and clear amid the swarming stars, and in the east the sky was dove-coloured with the approaching dawn.

The next day we spent very quietly. There was no one there but Margery's mother and myself, and we hardly went beyond the garden; for Margery's time, you will understand, was nearly come, and in a week or two she would be the mother of Dick's child. After tea that

afternoon we had a long talk together, for her mother had gone out on some household business, and she spoke to me of that which was coming to her, with all the simplicity of her nature, all the triumph and glory of her loving heart.

'I want you to come down again as soon as possible after it,' she said, 'because it seems so inevitable that you must be here to take part in this great joy of Dick's and mine. You see, Jack, I can't remember a single joy or sorrow of my life with which you and Dick were not bound up, as it were. And this—the greatest of all. Do come as soon as mother writes to you.'

The dusk began to fall in layers over the sky, and the evening breeze got up and tossed the incense of the flowers' evensong over the garden. Then, as night closed in, the smell of syringa and lilac fell asleep, and the sweet-peas closed, and the benediction of the stars shone from the heights of heaven. Then Margery rose from her chair, and held out both hands to me.

'Oh, my dear,' she said, 'every day I thank God for giving me you as my friend and Dick's.

For years I have done that, even when I was a child. And now that I am a woman, and the crown of womanhood is coming to me, I tell you this, and I ask you to continue to be the friend of all of us. I thank you, Jack; I bless you with my whole heart.'

And once again she kissed me.

My God, how content I was at that moment! For at that moment the foe which I had been fighting all the year, whose sword was jealousy of Dick, whose spear was bitterness of heart, whose armour was the human longing and the crying of the flesh for this woman, dropped dead. No longer would I have had anything different: all was utterly good; and she whom I loved stood over me in the gathering silence of the night, and under her feet lay that devilish enemy whom her goodness and sweetness had slain.

We dined with great gaiety and foolishness, and dinner was succeeded by absurd games, in which the two members of the alliance of laughter did wonders for the cause. Then Margery and her mother went upstairs, and I strolled into the garden again to smoke for half an hour before

going to bed, with the reaction of laughter rather strong upon me, and feeling, in spite of what had happened before dinner, vaguely disquieted and depressed, and my mind went back and dwelt with curious insistence on the hallucination of Dick's voice the night before. Then, even while I was pondering on the strangeness of it, and telling myself that I must have been asleep, I suddenly heard the clang of the gate leading from the road to the front-door on the other side of the house, followed by the crunching of gravel, and after a moment the sound of the front-door bell. At that a sudden nameless fear leaped into my heart, and before the bell sounded again I was at the front-door. Outside was a telegraph-boy, with a War Office telegram addressed to Margery. I took it from him, closed the door quietly, and stood there with it in my hand, struck motionless and incapable of thought.

Then upstairs I heard a door open, and next moment my name was called by Margery, her voice half strangled and struggling for utterance. 'Jack, Jack, what is it?' she called. 'What is it? what is it?' Next moment I saw her leaning

over the banisters of the landing above, her hair down, and with a dressing-gown on, and she saw what I held in my hand.

'Will you bring it up to me, please, Jack, or open it there?' she said faintly, and I heard the banisters creak as she leaned on them and clutched them. Then her mother hurried out of her room and put her arm round her.

I can hear the tearing of that envelope now, the rustle of the unfolding sheet. The few words it contained for a moment meant nothing. Then they became coherent.

'Is it about Dick?' whispered Margery. 'Is he wounded? Tell me quick.'

I looked up, and I do not remember whether I said anything or not. But she knew, and in the dim light from the turned-down lamp in the hall I saw her rise to her full height, with arms outstretched, then sway, and fall back into her mother's arms.

The telegram fluttered to the ground, and I ran upstairs. Together we lifted her up, carried her into her room, and laid her on the bed.

'Dick is killed?' whispered her mother to me, and I nodded. Then at her request I left them, and ran to wake one of the servants.

'Don't go to bed,' she said, as I left the room; 'you may be wanted. Would you sit up till I see you? Have your bicycle ready.'

The drawing-room, through which I had come a minute before in answer to the bell, looked out through French windows on to the garden, and here I sat waiting for her mother. As yet the news to me was inconceivable; it seemed merely impossible that it should be so. Something would happen: another telegraph-boy would come, or, what seemed more likely, I should wake to find that I was not here and the time was not now. Perhaps the place would be Braceton, perhaps the time would be a year ago. Yet how could that be? For she had spoken to me of Dick, and of Dick's child. There was nothing in the world so real as those minutes. And in this dumb, dazed mood I went once into the hall to see if my bicycle was there; for if these things were a dream, surely I should find some incongruity, and perhaps that which should have been a bicycle might be Dick.

But the bicycle stood there, with its lamp already lit, as I had left it.

Then came quick steps descending the stairs, and I went out into the hall.

'Please go into the town at once, Jack,' said her mother, 'and bring Dr. Carlton. Make him come at once. If he is not in, bring somebody.'

'What—what! Oh, tell me something!' I said.

'Her child will be born sooner than we expected,' said she. 'Oh, be quick!'

The road was empty of passengers and very dark. Once a man—a policeman, I think—shouted something after me; once the shadow of a dog raced me for awhile, snarling and snapping. Otherwise all I know of that four miles is a round space of illumination on the road cast by my lamp, I seemingly motionless, while to right and left trees and houses went noiselessly by, and a wind blew steadily, in spite of the turns of the road, from the direction in which I was speeding. Then the lamp-posts of the town began, and I had the sense to go somewhat more slowly for fear of being taken up, and so delayed. Then, crossing the High Street, I came to the square red-brick house.

For an interminable time, so it seemed to me, I waited on the doorstep, and then the door was opened by an impassive man-servant. Dr. Carlton was at dinner, and there was a party, but as soon as he came out the message should be delivered; and I remember saying that I would go into the dining-room myself unless I could see him at once. Then, after another interminable delay, Dr. Carlton, whom I knew slightly, came out.

'Come at once,' I said—'Mrs. Alington.'

'Not her confinement?' he said, frowning.

'She has just had news of Dick's death,' said I, 'and her mother told me that—that the baby might be born sooner than they expected. Oh, man, don't argue!'

'How did you come?' said he.

'Bicycle. It's outside.'

He turned to his servant.

'Tell them to put the pony in at once,' he said, 'and bring it round. And'—he looked at me sharply a moment—'bring some brandy.'

I suppose I made some gesture of impatience, for he laid his hand on my arm with a quieting force.

'Now, be sensible,' he said; 'I am going to get what I may require, and shall go off on your bicycle. You will follow in the cart, and, until it is ready, you will sit down here and drink a wine-glassful of brandy—neat, mind: I order it.'

He nodded at me, pointing to a chair, and I stumbled towards it, conscious for the first time of an overpowering exhaustion. My blood beat through my temples very thin and far away, but with frightful rapidity, and something sang in my ears like the whistle of a distant train. Then I became conscious that the butler had put a glass of brandy into my hand, and I drank it.

'The cart will be round in ten minutes, sir,' he said.

'But Dr. Carlton?' I asked.

'Rode off a couple of minutes ago, sir. I should sit still, sir, if I were you.'

It can hardly have been an hour from the time the telegram first came to when the cart with me inside it drew up at Margery's house. Against the porch leaned my bicycle, the lamp still burning, and lights, I saw, were burning in her bedroom directly over the door. Standing on a

chair inside the hall was Dr. Carlton's hat and a small black bag; on the floor close by was the pink sheet of the telegram, which I must have dropped when I ran upstairs. Even then I remember clinging in some desperate, dazed fashion to the hope that it was all a dream, and that the telegram would prove to be some trivial absurdity, and I picked it up and read it again.

Then I sat down and waited.

From time to time there was some muffled sound of footsteps and movement above, then silence again, then more steps. Then I heard a door open above, and a droning voice which I knew to be Margery's speaking in level, meaningless tones. Then the doctor's voice said sharply:

'Yes, it is in my bag. Bring it all upstairs if you don't understand.'

With the bag in my hand, I met the servant hurrying downstairs, sobbing in a helpless manner. She took the bag from me without a word, and went up again. And step by step, after I had heard the door close, I moved to the top of the stairs and sat there. Below, the clock in the hall beat out metallic minutes, and once the hour—

twelve only—struck. Through the fanlight above the front-door I could see the lamps of the doctor's dogcart; three or four times they moved away, and after a minute or so returned again to the same spot. At intervals that terrible droning voice came from Margery's room.

How long these things lasted I cannot say, but it must have been less than two hours, for I knew the hall clock struck once only. Then the droning voice ceased altogether, and in its place came short, incisive sentences in a man's voice, the purport of which, of course, I could not hear. Then came the cry of a child, and I knew that in the midst of death we are in life.

Then, as if I had been drawn by cords, I crept nearer and nearer to the door of the room, and the crying of the child still sounded—the cry of Dick's child. And Dick? Oh, Dick! if your brave, blithe spirit in the paradise of God, now free of its habitation of flesh, keeps watch, as it surely must, over those it loves, come here, come here, where there is so sore a need of you and your comforting. Speak to her through that frail tabernacle of time and space; comfort the soul

you love, if the laws of your world permit it. Come!

* * * * *

Later in that long night Dr. Carlton told me all he could tell. The child had been born, and it lived. There was no reason why it should not live, for it was quite healthy, though it had been born before its time. About Margery he could not say. She had not rallied satisfactorily. She had been perfectly conscious for a time after the birth of the child, but with her consciousness had returned the knowledge of her husband's death, and she had relapsed again into a semi-comatose state. He proposed to wait, visiting her from time to time, till he could feel more happy about her.

Twice before the dawn broke I tried to go to bed, and as many times I crept downstairs again to where Dr. Carlton sat in the drawing-room, his genial, florid face looking more anxious and troubled each time he returned from a visit upstairs. Then, just as morning broke in thin red lines on the horizon, I heard his voice call to me, and I went upstairs. He beckoned to me to come in.

Margery was lying in bed, propped up on pillows, and her eyes were closed. I sat by the bedside and waited. They had taken the baby away, and only her mother knelt there, with her eyes fixed on Margery's face. Suddenly she raised her head a little, opened her eyes, and saw me.

'Thank you,' she said—'thank you for being here, Jack. Dick is waiting for me. Yes, Dick!'

She raised herself a little more, and seemed to struggle for breath.

'Is it morning?' she said. 'Let in the morning.'

And even as I pulled the curtains aside and raised the blinds there dawned on her the Everlasting Day.

JULY

JULY

I HAVE told you about the May of three years ago, and the June of two years ago, because those two months are so dedicated in my mind to what happened then, that, while the months are running, I cannot free myself from them and live in the present year. Have you not certain such dates in your year—days on which you live, not on the day that is now passing, but on a certain day in some year long past? There is a foolish proverb that says that those people are happy who have no history. In other words, it is better to be a cow than a man. I cannot see it. But if it will not bore you, and if, in fact, my May and June are ever so little human to you, I will tell you quite shortly a little more of them. If, on the other hand, this does bore you, leave out the next four pages.

Believe me, death is not so terrible; what is

terrible is the thought that it is so. But learn how false that thought is, and death will not terrify you. For what lies behind? God and He who died for us. And if I am wrong, if it is not so, nothing whatever seems to me to matter, and we can look on death as on a flea-bite. But believing, as I do, that beyond death—even as on this side of it—is God, when lives have ended, as those of Margery and Dick, so utterly without reproach, when two souls have been so splendidly human as they were, it seems that God must have been knowing what He was about when He allowed that bullet—blindly illogical as it may seem to us—to end her life as surely as it ended his. I can understand the existence of a lifelong regret and bitterness *if a thing had not been well done*, if a man died from obvious carelessness of any kind, or from weak persistence in a bad habit. Then one might say, 'If it had been otherwise!' But he had done his duty, and his duty implied death. And his death — I only grope dimly after what I believe to be true—implied hers. Does this seem to you a stoical, unhuman view? Ah! believe me, it is not so. It would have been

very easy for one who loved them both to take another point of view, and find life dull, objectless, without interest or merriment. But—but would that have been better? Would it have been better to have turned aside from all other things, saying 'I cannot,' rather than to have steadfastly said 'I can,' until—well, until one could? Some day I know, on that day when Slam's kitten stands between earth and heaven in the midst of the four pines, and Slam says, 'Oh, it is nice!' there will meet me one who died on the African uplands, and one on whose grave the sweet-peas are yearly odorous; and we shall know each other, and God will look on the greeting we give each other, well pleased. How that will be I cannot guess; I am only sure that it will be so. Atheists and dyspeptics (the two are much the same) may laugh, and if they enjoy their laugh so much the better for them.

* * * * *

So I am living now on the outskirts of the town where Margery and Dick lived together for one month of their lives, and on this morning of the 1st of July I know that May and June have ended,

and go back to the ordinary little daily affairs I had been telling you about up till the end of April. Many great little things have happened, and the extraordinary conduct of the Jackmanni which the cat from next door once disinterred seems to me to claim the first attention. It had been planted against a warm south-westerly wall; it had been pampered like an only child; for yards round the soil had been enriched; its dead leaves were diligently picked off. I really did all I could to make it happy. But instead of being happy, it sulked. It did not die—that would have been a regrettable incident, but, anyhow, a proper decisive line of conduct — but it sulked. It grew a little for a week, and put out several leaves; then it couldn't be bothered, and the leaves withered again. Then it sent out a long tendril across the gravel path instead of climbing up the stick that led to the house-wall. I coaxed that tendril gently back, gave it an alternative route to the house-wall, but nothing would please it. Finally I tied it to the alternative route. So it died.

I was willing to give the thing every facility

for behaving itself, so I transplanted it to a different place, where it got less sun and more wind. Also I tried watering it less. For a week it appreciated this enormously, and set about growing in earnest. Then one morning, I suppose, it got bored again, and began to wither slowly from the top downwards.

Now, I could not spend my life in moving one absurd Jackmanni from place to place, though I have no doubt that if I had done so, taken it to stay in other houses, given it champagne one day, coffee the next, and perhaps some fish or pudding on the third, it would have flourished. But I was tired of being kind, and towards the end of May I took it up for the third and last time, planted it on a north wall, where it never saw the sun and was starved by a thick growth of ivy. It was further shaded by an apple-tree growing about a yard from it. Then for a month I carefully refrained from looking in its direction; it had no water, no attention, and was put in the most undesirable situation. To-day I see it has leapt across to the apple-tree, up which it is diligently climbing, and clusters of purple buds

are showing among its green leaves. Certainly severity is needed when you deal with Jack-manni.

To-day, on this 1st of July, a hot day full of the odours of complete summer, I sat for an hour in the big wooden shelter that now stands finished on my strip of lawn, and squared accounts. It happens to be my birthday, and I am thirty years old—no less—and as I added up profit and loss I was horribly puzzled how to make my affairs balance. For if one sits down by one's self, with no conceivable object in the world but to see how one stands, it is probable that one is moderately honest with one's self, for to be otherwise would be like cheating at Patience, one of the few forms of villainy which has never in the least tempted me. With regard to the big item on one page, '*What good have you done?*' and on the other, '*What harm have you done?*' I am bound to say I did not much concern myself, for to add up, even for one's own information, on what rare occasions one has behaved decently is a priggishness of which, so I humbly trust, I am incapable; while to add up all the harm one has done would

require a great deal of time, and would be productive of no good result whatever when it was added. For, short of being wicked, the next worst way of wasting time is to devote one's time to thinking how wicked one has been. To repent in a horror of wickedness and a burning fire of contrition is one thing; to sit down in cold blood and count missed opportunities is another. The one is on certain occasions, as when one passionately desires to break an evil habit, inevitable and salutary, but to sit at ease in Hell is worse than sitting at ease in Zion.

No, it was not with the big item that I concerned myself. I wanted to see what cash I had in hand, rather than examine the main account—the bank-book of credit or deficit. Where was the small cash of thirty years, in fine—and God in His mercy give me a big loan. Indeed I do not wish to be profane, nor in intention am I. No doubt it would have been better to have felt an agony of contrition for all the bad things I had done, and for all the good things I had left undone. Daily I have thoughts which for no sum mentionable would I reveal to anyone whose

respect I in the smallest degree desired to retain ; daily and hourly I make some sort of brute of myself, not necessarily in deed, but anyhow in thought. Daily I say to myself, 'If only there were not some kind of decency to be observed, social or moral, what an excellent time I could have! If only the Ten Commandments—hang them!—did not awake some glimmer of reflection in this muddy pool of my soul, I should——' Anyone may fill in the rest according to his own shortcomings. In the same way, on the credit side, I believe I should be a better man if I lived on the bare necessities of life, and gave the rest to deserving charities. I had no earthly business, for instance, to buy the charming table at which I am writing, when that which I spent on it would have fed a starving family for months. Even the Jackmanni, which has cost me a week's work, what with transplanting and cat-squirting, would, irrespective of this, have given several meals to a penniless man, for it was big when I bought it. All this, in my meditation, I took for granted. I did not concern myself with radical changes in my nature. I did not repent of the table and the

Jackmanni, nor of the dinner I ordered, nor of the wine I have drunk, nor of the hours I have spent in mere amusement. In the main it was not in the least an edifying performance; I accepted the general lines of myself as being what they were. What, in fact, I wished to examine was not my nature, but my policy, and to this effect:

Two great things have happened to me—the one a great joy, the other a great sorrow. The great joy was when Margery thanked me with her dying breath, though Dick's name came after. The great sorrow was when she died. Had she lived—though I do not for a moment believe I should ever have been her husband, nor do I believe I should ever have asked her to be my wife—I should have had some sort of mission, some constant pursuit, namely, to see that she was as happy as it was in my power to make her. Had I been a telegraph-boy, I should have done well if I had delivered my telegrams without loitering; had Margery lived, I should have done well to have given my life to that. But she did not live, and I am too old to be a telegraph-boy.

But I have had a great joy, and it is great because she did not know how hardly it was earned. And that is my record. That is the sum earned, and the credit already given is thirty years. It does not look at all promising when the addition comes.

Hesitatingly, as I sat in the shelter, I put down another item to the sum earned, which is this: I still have a childlike pleasure in little things; I can play soldiers with absorbing zest; I can imagine that I am a white man in tropical forests, who has to get through with tricks that presuppose an almost pitiable stupidity on the part of my enemies; I can devote quite as much energy to the flowering of a nasturtium as Mr. Pierpont Morgan finds it necessary to give to the formation of a company with a capital of £30,000,000. That, with all deference to financiers, is an advantage. My nasturtium, in fact, implies as much energy as his colossal schemes, and it does not hurt anybody, except perhaps the nasturtium. Meantime, it unloads me of my force, and, considering what harm force can do, it is a great saving of suffering to expend it

harmlessly. If I was richer, I would have a string quartet attached to this villa, and I would spend my force in devising programmes, and reconciling the second fiddle and the viola. But I am not, and the string quartet has yet to be engaged. I know whom I shall have, and I shall be much disappointed if they have made other engagements.

For happiness consists not in getting a thing, but in hoping that one may get it. With satisfaction walks surfeit; but to keep your ambition steadily a little ahead of your possibilities is to be constantly eager. There is nothing in the world which, if I got, would make me happy. There are a million things in the world which the desire to get and the hope of getting make me happy. And it is this which a man sets out to seek when he falls in love, which is the best form of happiness devised in the world at large, and, thank God! the commonest. If man or woman knew *all* of the man or woman each sought, would either be content? On the contrary, the world would be full of spinsters and bachelors. It is *because* one is not certain, *because* there are 'silver lights

and darks undreamed of,' that man seeks woman and woman man as the ultimate possible happiness. And for the same reason one plays silly games of croquet or bridge.

To want, to want! Do you know Blake's picture of the two little men setting up a ladder on a bare headland towards a crescent moon. 'I want, I want!' is what the artist wrote beneath. The two little men wanted—they put a puny ladder up towards—the moon. That is the genius of the man, for through all the bad drawing and faulty perspective the 'I want, I want!' is clamorous. Others have attained. God help them!

Oh, I stretch out unsatisfied arms beyond the limits of the world! Whatever I get becomes in the getting of it dross. It is not dross really; it is the fact of my having got it which makes it dross to me. It is mine, therefore it is no use. Let the Great Bear tumble down from heaven, and let me find seven stars lying in my hand: what use are they when they are there? Cast them out—give them to a beggar, and make plans for Sirius. Of all the heartaches, that of

Alexander when he sighed for new worlds to conquer is the most human. Yet the typhoid conquered him by Tigris. And his ambition was that of all of us in our degree. The man who has bought an empire or won it wishes for more empire, and the spinster who has seen her canary hatch out one egg, and eat the other, says: 'Oh that there had been two young ones!' 'Vanity of vanities; all is vanity.' And because this preacher is not wise, but knows what is the matter with himself and many others, he gives these lamentable reflections on his thirtieth birthday.

Pray, then, that you may continue to want, not that you may continue to get; for the getting in a manner comes of its own accord, and it is the ability to want that we must keep alive. We may feel quite certain that the world is big enough; there are plenty of things to want if only we have the power of wanting. For wanting means just this—the *capacity of growth.* To want no longer, means that one is old—old not only in years (indeed, such an old age may come to an unbearded lad, in which case we laugh, and say, 'Look at that cynic of twenty'), but old in

fibre, inelastic, set, rigid. Nor does it, I think, much matter what one wants—again I beg the patient reader to remember that I am not talking of the great spiritual needs—as long as it is not harmful. But for any sake try to be keen about something.

At this point my reflections, to tell the truth, touched me somewhat on the raw, for what have I wanted every day for the last two years? That which I cannot get—Margery. And yet how shall I say that I cannot get her, when, if I knew all, I might know that these silent daily longings of mine have brought me, perhaps, a little nearer to that dear spirit, that without them I should have been a little more ill-tempered, a little nastier, than I am. Anyhow, I want to want. For I do not yet acquiesce, I cannot yet believe, that the world holds nothing for me but that. Here am I walking along this road of life. All down it I meet every day new faces, new people, new factors. One sees but a few yards ahead; then there is a corner, and round that corner will come others, looking like myself for that which their soul needs. Oh, hurrying footsteps, coming ever

nearer, is there not one among you all that will stop when you reach me, and go no further in your quest? Is there not one which shall, while still a great way off, strike on my ear as distinct and utterly different from all others—one which I recognise, though I have never yet seen her to whom that step belongs. Among these miles of eager human eyes, shall not some day mine eyes seek other eyes, and find there that which has been predestined for me by God? O Margery, my dear friend, how you will welcome her (should I find her), for her sake and for mine, when we meet in the everlasting habitations!

Another train of birthday reflections led to this conclusion: 'Give up the pursuit of anything which seems to you of doubtful gain.' For there are so many indisputably good and real pursuits in the world, that it cannot possibly be worth while pursuing what may not be wholly good, and may possibly be not wholly real. Here I have a certain small right to speak, for in the last year I have given up something which seemed to me of possibly doubtful gain, and I have found that it was a wise step. That which I have given up is

singularly known as 'the world.' I once thought that it was a good thing to see hundreds of people, to multiply acquaintances, to be able to say, 'Charming party! —— was there, and ——, and ——,' naming people who really concerned me as little as I really concerned them; telling myself—even then, I think, I had some secret notion of conscience-salving—that to live in the bubble and roar of the world was stimulating. So no doubt it is, but a stimulant is not necessarily healthy. Thus it seemed to me (one can only speak for one's self) to come under the head of 'doubtful gain.' But it is a quite certain gain to study the habits of the ill-content Jackmanni—I am sorry for introducing that again, but I cannot get over it—it is a quite certain gain to read a good book; to try to learn the Fugues and Preludes — provided, of course, the incidental pain to others is not more than they should be reasonably asked to bear; to be in the open air, and, above all, to do your work, whatever it is. If you have none, get some. It hardly matters at all what it is, so long as it is harmless. But merely to go from dinner to dance

is a doubtful gain. You would do better—at least, I should—to talk to a friend for half an hour, and then, if you wish for the crowd merely, as I often do, walk for ten minutes up and down Piccadilly. For if that does not give you the food you want, you may be sure you will not find it anywhere else.

Another most fascinating hobby, though I expect it is extremely easy to give too much time to it, is the pursuit of health. Certainly it is more easy of accomplishment to most people than the pursuit of happiness, and the one, to a very large extent, implies the other. For the pursuers of happiness, for the most part, are Hedonists. They think—and herein err very greatly—that to multiply pleasure tends to make one happy. In point of fact, it does nothing of the kind, for pleasures are to some extent obtainable by most people, whereas happiness is almost completely a matter of temperament. And the happy temperament cannot possibly have anything to do with pleasures. No amount of pleasure will foster it at all; whereas, if you have got the happy temperament, almost everything by that mysterious

alchemy is turned into pleasure—even as a rose-tree turns that which its root-fibres suck from the earth into blossom. And certainly health is a great help to happiness, for to be well—really well—makes 'the mere living,' as Browning says, a joy, and at times it seems enough to be alive. For which would you rather be—a bilious man, with all the pleasures of the world at his disposal, or well, with 'the book of verses underneath the bough,' and a thrush, maybe, singing of what should be above you ?

Keenness of perception, in fact, I soberly believe to be the greatest cause of happiness (and so, necessarily, of pleasure, since happiness turns the most trivial incidents and sensations of the moment into pleasure) that is within our reach. And so inextricably is the mind and soul bound up with the body, that—apart from great spiritual enthusiasm or ecstasy—this keenness of perception can scarcely be reached except through a certain cleanly healthiness. In fact, it presupposes a temperament of almost divine serenity to enjoy a day on which one has influenza; whereas there is a sort of health, which is probably within the reach

of most people, in which, from the heightened keenness of perception it brings with it, the smallest things are causes of joy or laughter.

This may sound a mere vain piece of optimism, but the truth of the matter is that three-quarters of the world are not nearly so well as they can and should be. Almost everybody, in fact, is greedy and lazy, and laziness and greed are more certain progenitors of discontent than any other ancestors I can think of. To eat rather more than one wants, to drink rather more than one should, is to feel disinclined for one's work or one's pleasure. And to be disinclined for a thing means, with most of us, to miss the pleasure of the doing. But to be inclined for work or pleasure implies that we find a nugget of happiness therein, for it is this alchemy of inclination which turns trivial incidents to gold, for the keenness turns the dross of mere achievement into happiness.

It is thus that the happy temperament may most readily be cultivated by those who have not naturally got it. Some have it, a royal birthright, worth more to its possessor than the piled crowns of the Great Powers; but by others it

has to be cultivated. And to cultivate keenness of perception by means of health is the simplest and most practicable method. And the organ in which ill-health mainly resides is, to put the matter frankly, the liver, because, as a rule, we eat and drink too much, avoid air as if it was strychnine, and do not take enough exercise. Thus my prescription is worth trying : Eat and drink less, open your windows more, and, if your work permits of it, be out-of-doors more. It may, of course, be easily possible that, to do your work properly, you have to sit in a stuffy room, and neglect your health somewhat ; if so, let your health take care of itself by all means, and get through with your work. But short of that, let your health receive the attention it deserves. It is a very sound investment, and will yield you excellent returns.

Dear God, in spite of May and June, how happy You allow me to be! How You have allowed me, in consideration of my foolishness, to find in life so much happiness! To-day, for instance, a golden sun was swung in a blue sky when I awoke, and only half-dressed I breakfasted in this shelter in the garden where I am writing

now. Three yards off was the Jackmanni with its purple buds, a little beyond a Crimson Rambler climbing up an apple-tree. On the grass stood two green tubs briming with nasturtiums ; up the garden bed ran the row of sweet-peas. All breakfast-time a thrush sat on the apple-bough and sang the song that can never be learned, and which no one ever taught it. Then, still out-of-doors, I sat and worked, and about twelve came a great bunch of lilac from a neighbour. Lunch-time brought two friends, and after lunch we hit little silly golf-balls over the great back of the down with matchless enthusiasm. And now I sit here again, as evening is beginning to fall, and the birds which were mute in the heat of the day are tuning up for evensong ; again the thrush is on the apple-bough, and an occasional silver flute of a note tells me that mating-time is not yet over with the nightingales. The bees still hunt in the drowsy and closing flowers, and swifts still race with shrill whistlings through the divided air, but every moment the stillness of evening gains on the beautiful noises of life, like a waveless tide creeping up the wrinkled sand of the sea-shore.

Already the sun is low, and soon the lengthening shadows will cease to be shadows, and the velvet blue of the night will darken in the turquoise-coloured skies. Already the night-flowering stocks and the tobacco-plant are opening, and, as they open, spread sweet webs of incense, low-lying from their heaviness, over the grass, and the pale moths begin to hover over the flowers. Dusk comes, and its cool benediction rests and recuperates the day-wearied earth, and it and its little inhabitants rest with bowed heads a moment, like some child at its mother's knee, drinking in quiet. The pause has come, day is over, it is not yet quite time to sleep ; be still, then, cease to move or worry or think. Lie open to the air and the stars, let your life pause, breathe deep, make no effort, and the thrush and the stars and the green things will communicate with that which is within you by direct ways.

Then as dusk deepens into night thought comes back ; but thought, too, is driven inwards, going home to roost, and for a little while, as I walk in this dewy grass by the sweet-peas, Margery will be leaning on my arm, talking to me of the days

that were—talking, too, in a way I do not yet fully understand, of the days that will be. Outside on the road I can hear unknown footsteps passing up and down, and every now and then she seems to say to me, 'Hush! Listen!' But the steps pass on. It is not yet.

AUGUST

AUGUST

I do not think that I have hitherto mentioned that, since I came here in the spring, the house in which Dick and Margery spent those few weeks together before he went out to South Africa has stood untenanted, and often during the past months I have wandered slowly by it, noting with a sort of pleasure, I think, that at any rate no one I knew lived there. The feeling was, I am aware, utterly unreasonable, but it was of the same childish and instinctive kind as that which prompts us to put away and not use, or at least not let others use, some little object which has been in any way closely connected with someone who is dead, whom we have loved. I do not think this feeling is in the least defensible, for it implies that we cut the dead off in ever so small a degree from the living, and thus tend to keep alive the sting of death. For in that the dead

have once been intertwined with our ordinary workaday lives, it is altogether a false sentiment which makes us separate them now, if we believe at all, as I do most fully, that they still are about and around us. All the same, it was with a certain surprise and shock that I saw early in August that the signboard that the house was to let was taken down, and that a few days later a furniture-van was drawn up at the door. In fact, this very natural and reasonable event disturbed me to a degree which I was totally unable to understand. It seemed dreadful, somehow, that others should be at home there (it never occurred to me at the time that it was highly unlikely that the house had stood vacant for two years), so wholly was it consecrated in my mind to those two. At the same time I realized my utter unreasonableness about the matter, and, instead of trying to combat it, attempted to take a shorter cut, and dismiss it as far as I could from the range of my conscious thoughts. Yet for weeks it lurked there in the shade, and as the weeks went on, though I never consciously dwelt on the thought, yet somehow the thought seemed to grow there in the dusk of

my mind, until I knew that all my subconscious brain was full of it. More especially I desired to remain in ignorance of who the intruders—for so I thought of them—were. As long as they remained utterly vague and unknown, I could feel no definite and incarnated resentment, but if once they were visualized I felt that the growth in the shadow might peer out with poisonous leaves into the sunlight of active and conscious thought.

I have tried to put incoherency coherently, and I feel I am drawing with definite outline that which was necessarily ill-defined ; but in no other way, except by words of definite meaning, can one indicate any impression, however mist-like. Let me, then, say at once that what I have said is overstated in the sense that if one tries to draw the actual phantoms of a nightmare they are overstated, because to state them at all is to lose the pervading vagueness, for hard outline. On the other hand, again, what I have written down is, I think, understated, since I try in vain to convey by words the vague and abiding disquiet I felt at the thought of the owner of the furniture-van that unloaded at the door. Only, as I have said,

this all lurked in the shadow, and though it grew, yet by persistent refusal to think directly of it, and by persistently endeavouring to continue in ignorance of whom the new tenants were, the dark growth never emerged into sunlight.

But it seems a curious irony of fate that so soon after I have written about the road to happiness this phantasmal and unreal ghost should 'arise to poison joy.' This, at any rate, is not exaggerated language, for the thought of the house tenanted once more lay like a shadow over my spirits. I was wholly unable (or at any rate I thought I was, which comes to the same thing) to banish the shadow from my mind, and it haunted both waking and sleeping thoughts with a dull never-ceasing weight. I, who hardly ever dream, and then only of astounding and mirthful adventure, groped nightly about ill-lit passages, which I believed to be passages in that house, in intolerable apprehension.

Sometimes, so it seemed to me, certain rooms were vividly lit inside, and through cracks below the door, or through the chink of the door ajar, I saw that there were bright lights inside the rooms,

which yet cast no filtering illumination into the passages through which I had to feel my way. At other times the whole house was wrapped in a misty obscurity, which was not the light of early morning nor yet the dusk of falling night, but something almost palpable to the touch; it was as if the gray veil of the future brushed across my eyes, some unseen hand stirring it, as if to lift it away, and in my dreams my eyes would strain into the darkness for the light that should show me what agencies moved about me.

These dreams, which were very persistent and occurred in dim sequence many times during the night, always opened in the same way. On falling asleep I passed straight into the nebulous atmosphere I have tried to describe, and was walking up to Margery's house. For the darkness, I never could see more of it than its square shape, a blot against the blotted sky; the door was always open, and the groping in the passages began. I was conscious always of many presences close round me, but the dusk hid them, and into the lighted rooms I never could enter, for it was somehow forbidden. Then one night an entirely

new dream came, sandwiched between the dreams of dusk, and in that I was going along the road to the house, not wrapped in obscurity, but in brilliant sunshine. Birds trilled in the bushes, flowers of extraordinary brilliance grew in the hedgerows, and I thought with an upleap of exultation that the passages would be blind no longer. Then I turned the corner and came on the house, and though I knew it was the right one, yet it had changed almost beyond recognition. The steps that led to the front-door were cracked and moss-ridden ; the creepers had so grown that they hung in curtains over the windows ; an indescribable air of age had passed over it. But the room over the front-door—Margery's room—was untouched by the gray hand of Time : the walls were still smooth, and it seemed to me the bricks newly-pointed ; the creepers were cut back from the window, which was wide open, and from inside came a voice singing. It sang a song that Margery always loved, and though the voice was like hers, yet it was not quite like.

It was with the wildest hopes and expectations that I entered the house, but once again, though

all was bright outside, the passages were dark. But I groped my way upstairs, and saw that the door of Margery's room stood open, and there, framed in the misty obscurity, stood a figure that must be hers. Line for line it repeated that form I knew so well; the slight bend of the neck, the outward sweep of the shoulders, were all hers. And in the darkness I gazed and gazed, for the veil seemed to brush upwards against my eyes, but it did not lift, and in an agony I cried out, 'Margery, Margery, is it you?' And my own voice, I suppose, awoke me, for I found myself seated up in bed, and the night outside was still very dark and hot, and I heard the hissing of steady rain on the shrubs.

So I lay down again, and must have gone to sleep immediately, for, without conscious pause, I was back in the dark passages as usual. But once again on that same night a new factor appeared in my dreams, for the presences, though still invisible, were inaudible no longer, and their footsteps passed about and around me very close. For a long time I listened, but heard none that concerned me; but at last there came one which I knew to be Dick's,

and with it went another that was Margery's, and they passed near me and went out—I suppose to the garden. It never occurred to me to follow, for I was outside their lives somehow, and if we came near each other it was that they came near to me. After that the steps of many strangers passed and repassed, and then once more I heard Margery's footstep alone. But when it came close I knew it was not Margery's, but like it, as the singing voice was like hers. Then slowly, as at the hint of dawn, the dim passages began to grow bright, and I looked to see where Margery was. But the brightness as it grew showed me only the walls and furniture of my own room, and through the open window came in the pale light of early day, as the morning breeze flapped the blind.

Now, by this time the dreams of the dark passages had lasted about a week, and the days betwixt the nights had been full of a corresponding depression; for by night it was the darkness that troubled me, and by day the shadow of the new folk who were coming to live there. Then came that night which I have described, and simultaneously both the dream of the dark passages and

the depression by day ceased entirely and altogether. I went back at once to the dreamless nights to which I was accustomed, and my days were once more a mosaic of happy hours. But the heaviness of those days and the ill-defined fear of those nights was so blackening to the spirit that at the time I soberly thought that some madness had begun to lay its finger on my brain; and now that I no longer fear that, I find myself wondering what could have induced this melancholy. The weather, it is true, was extremely hot and depressing, and for the whole week it is also true I was working against time at a piece of work I did not wish to do. Before I had been a day at it, I knew that it was distasteful; before I had been two at it, I felt sure it was not worth while to do it at all.

Now, being temporarily bored with one's work is one thing; radical disapproval is another. It may easily happen that, to bring about a situation rightly, several chapters of what seems to one at the time (and very likely is) sorry stuff have to be hammered into shape. Due preparation for the situation has to be made without giving the situation away; only when it comes the reader should

say to himself: 'Of course it must be so; why didn't I think of it?' But radical disapproval is a far different matter. It is rank immorality to go on spending time and pains over what is worthless or worse, and that rank immorality I committed. Then, when the work in question, the oppressive weather, and the disordered dreams, which began simultaneously, also ended simultaneously, I felt that it was highly probable that they were all bound up together. Certainly, it is more than possible that they all reacted on each other—that the thunder in the skies led to a general depression that made my immorality sit heavy on me, and induced a gloom by day that was carried over into the night. Again, the fact that I slept in the shadows brought shadows into the day; and the fact that I spent the hours unprofitably, and knew it, predisposed to gloomy visions. At the same time, the persistence of the same dream was curious, and the society that collects nightmares are at liberty to put it on a pin. Such, however, is the record of what happened during the first week of August.

Thereafter ensued three spoilt days, spoilt not

by outside agencies, but by fussy stupidity on my part. To the ordinary citizen such spoiling means nothing, for in all probability he will never experience it, and thus to him the trials of these three days are senseless. But given that your household comprises only a plain (very plain) cook, and what would be called in London a 'general'—though such have no idea of campaign—it will appeal to the minority to know that the question of what one wanted for ten days at Bayreuth, and perhaps a week's wandering in Germany, was crucial. It was no use saying vaguely—as I suppose one does to a valet—'I shall be away for ten days; pack'; but seriatim I had to think of all that I should conceivably want. The result was that early on the second day I found that I had packed all the necessaries of life, and had to unpack them all again. This, and the subsequent repacking, took the whole of the third day. Even then, since I had to leave at cockcrow to catch the evening boat to Ostend, there were many things insoluble. Were there baths at Bayreuth, or should I take an indiarubber bath? Were there washerwomen, or should I

take as much linen as there were days? *Seigneur, quelle vie!*

Now, though I regret these pin-points of indecision, yet I defend them. For if one is going abroad for six months, all that is necessary to do is to put out every stick and button you have in the world, and bid the grand portmanteaux advance. But for ten days or a fortnight surely such equipment is beyond the mark. Therefore one has to select. Here comes in the worst of an imaginative mind. One can easily picture circumstances, even in the course of ten days, in which one will want each single suit of clothes one possesses. For instance, there may quite easily be a cold spell of weather, and therefore it is necessary to take one suit of thick clothes, also to be worn on the night journey. But supposing one gets caught during this cold spell by a sudden storm? The cold spell continues, but the thick clothes are wet. Therefore one must take two suits of thick clothes. However, warm weather is more likely, and there must be at least two suits of flannels. Four suits. Then for emergencies of the social kind one must not be found

defenceless, and some sort of tailed apparatus must come. Five suits. Dress-clothes. Six. Also there is excellent trout-fishing not far from Bayreuth, and I have been particularly told to bring a rod. That entails knickerbockers and a Norfolk jacket. Seven suits.

At this point I paused; I was taking seven suits in order to clothe my unworthy body for a space of ten days in a Bavarian village. Yet where was the flaw? Of all things in the world I hate to be away from home, wanting something which I have forgotten to take, and, which is worse, decided not to take. Time was when it was so simple to put in that article, but the opportunity is mine no longer, and I sigh for the undenuded wardrobes.

I scorn to reproduce more of these indecisions; I would sooner reproduce French as spoken in the hot bath, and it will suffice to say that, having spent hours which will never return in process of careful selection, I eventually discarded selection altogether, and filled all the portmanteaux I possess. However, for the future I shall waste no more time in thinking what I shall want on short journeys,

for I know I shall end in taking all I have, and it saves trouble to begin with that.

I do not know whether we are all descended from gipsies, but certainly in most people something of the instinct which loves to wander, to make a journey merely for the joy of going, survives. True it is that punctual trains (the South-Eastern, however, has a good deal of admirable romance and uncertainty about it) and well-appointed steamboats, which leave stone-jettied ports at regular and ascertainable times, have sucked much of the unknown from travel, and so robbed this instinct of its fruition, but they cannot quite starve it. Even though you travel in a Pullman car, and sit on plush with your head among voluptuous gildings, and gaze into looking-glasses which show you the country and the telegraph-posts reeling giddily backwards, yet you still travel; and, at any rate, if you are going where you have never been before, something new and unknown waits for you behind the advancing line of the horizon. Thus, the one thing I never need on a journey is a book; it is sufficient enter-

tainment for me merely to look out of the window and see new country—vale and glen or plain and mountain-peak—come up to greet me in endless procession. So swiftly one moves that it is hardly possible to weary of what one sees before it is gone, and every bend in the line may show something admirable. But above all things the headlong passage through the station of a large town delights me. First comes a mile of sordid house-backs built on to the line; then a short tunnel at which the engine screams; then a wider glance of the town, with perhaps a gray cathedral tower watching over it all; then close against the window slanting lines of people, like rain, on the gray, tapering platform, the name of the station hidden, like a plum in a bun from its refreshment-room, in plasters of advertisement; the signal-box with its rows of gleaming semaphores; the mile of sordid house-roofs again; and out into the green fields. Then at a stile giving on to the line there wait a couple of children, whom in all human probability you will never see again, waving their hats at the gay express. For a glimpse only you saw them, but they have their lives in front

of them, fraught with momentousness to themselves at least, and perhaps to others. It is even possible that in years to come the lines of your life may cross theirs—that tragedy or comedy is already weaving the ropes that will bind you together in love or death or laughter. For of all phrases 'a chance meeting' is the most illogical. If chance exists at all, nothing exists except chance. Your most careful plan may be spoiled 'by chance,' as you will say. Then, your careful plan was chance, too, since chance can wreck it.

The backwaters of life, like the backwaters of streams, have an enormous fascination for me, for both are extraordinarily pleasing to the eye and restful to the mind. The great stream of progress hurries by them, while they revolve gently under shelter in sedate eddies, and sometimes sticks and straws from the stream get flung aside into them, and at once they join that slow, unhurrying circle. Such a backwater is Bayreuth; a tram-line and an advertisement of Sunlight Soap are the only touches of modernity I noticed in the town, for the theatre stands apart from it, a mile away beneath the pine-woods of the pleasant Bavarian hills.

But otherwise it is a backwater of the purest type, not ancient and not modern, any more than is a backwater in a stream, but merely existent and unhurrying.

The inhabitants, we must suppose, buy and sell things from each other; some are richer than others, but apparently not much, and none, I should think, are either very rich or very poor. Some also are better-looking than others, but not much; some rather wider-awake, but all seem to have set as a seal on their foreheads a ruminating mediocrity in all points and qualities which the human mind is able to conceive. Apart from the festival, it is impossible to imagine being either very happy or very unhappy in Bayreuth; 'very,' in fact, is a word which is without meaning there.

Yet here, by a strange irony of fate, is planted the cult of perhaps the most 'very' mind that ever existed, for the brick theatre on the hill-side is the casket which holds that heart of flame and song. Critics have beggared dictionaries to express their feelings about Wagner, and whether it is synonyms for 'charlatan' they have searched for, or synonyms for 'sublime,' none have yet thought

of levelling at him the charge of dulness or mediocrity. Indeed, to discuss him at all seems to imply that you are not in that calm frame of mind in which alone can discussion be profitable, and the violence which marks his music and drama seem at once to infect the mind of his critic. Strangest of all, even Tolstoi—who of all great writers seems to be almost utterly devoid of any sense of beauty, though in matters of sordidness and ugliness the skill of his art is worthy to stand by Shakespeare's—has allowed himself to be drawn into the mad circle, and has given us in his volume on Art a dozen pages which for sheer ineptitude of criticism, complete ignorance of his subject, and utter incompetence to deal with it, must rank for ever with the colossal failures of the world, such as the Panama Canal and the fall of Napoleon. But the calm frame of mind deserts me ; discussion is not profitable.

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It was after the second act of 'Parsifal,' and from the cool darkness of the theatre we streamed silently out into the brilliant sunshine of the late afternoon. The sun was near to its setting, and the

whole plain below us was steeped and stupefied in the level rays. A blue haze of heat-mist lay over the further hills, emphasizing the enlacement of their ridges, which stood out like the muscles of some strong arm.

Above the theatre rose the quiet pine-woods, hardly whispering, so still was the evening, and it was to them that my friend and I turned, for the poisonous enchantment of Klingsor's garden had to be expelled, and we neither of us cared to join in shrill discussions about the exquisite phrasing of Kundry, since it was the seduction of her phrases that more occupied us. For an hour the evil flowers had bloomed, and that evil was not of the foul sort that makes one turn from it, but of the seemingly innocent welcome of maidens that wear flowers, and of an evil woman who spoke not of evil things, but of sacred things—a mother's love, and her own love for him who was pure.

So we sat in the pine-woods, and let the fermenting vat of sin lose its effervescence, and waited till the sour-smelling bubbles broke no more on its iridescent surface. And the sun sank

till it touched the hills, and where it touched they changed to semi-transparent amber, and a crescent moon rose in the east, and one bird fluted in the bush. Then the first trumpet from below sounded the *motif* of the 'Love-feast,' and down we went. From the mad fires of the sunset we passed into the cool gloom of the theatre, and the doors were shut, and soon the curtain rose on the last act.

* * * * *

So were the wanderings of Parsifal accomplished, yet he remained still the pure youth who once, in ignorance of suffering, had shot a swan as it circled above a lake, wantonly and without thought. Yet when he saw it dead, then for the first time had pity knocked a little on the door of his heart. Since then had years sped by, and temptations hideous and beautiful and strong and subtle had been ever about his path and about his bed. Yet he was still without guile, nor was there spot or stain on his virgin soul. Albeit he was very weary, and for years had he been very weary, and sometimes he had prayed that he might die, not knowing what he prayed, for the flesh

was weak. But the Sacred Spear which he bore ever with him, that spear which had pierced the side of our Blessed Lord, was his strength and his firm defence, as it had ever been since he had won it from Klingsor the magician, unarmed except for the armour of his pure heart.

So it came about that on the dawning of that day on which our Blessed Lord was crucified his wanderings led him back to that place from which they had started, ere yet he had confounded the sorcerer Klingsor, and in the garden of seduction had resisted the wiles of Kundry, who laughed at our Blessed Lord what time He bore the cross of our redemption to Calvary, and thus henceforth could never weep, but by her laughter lured the souls of men to hell. Weary beyond all speech was he with his wanderings, in which he ever fought against the powers of evil, and he wot not whither he had come, nor that it was the Blessed Friday on which he had come thither, for, in that he did ever his dear Lord's work, that it was now the day on which He suffered on the cross for our redemption was less to him than the work of salvation which he himself daily accom-

plished. Nor saw he the brightness of the meadows, nor read the joyous message that Spring wrote on the blossoming hawthorn and on the green places of the earth. For the turning Year had put on her fresh mantle, and like some fair maiden had dressed herself against the coming of her lover. The brooks all down the valley of Monsalvat—for to Monsalvat he was come again—were no more thick or tainted with the melted snows, nor had summer yet made them run low or less melodiously ; but they brimmed through the meadows, combing the waving grasses that leaned to them and drank of their coolness, and over their pebbly beds they glanced and sparkled like young things at play. Between the stems of the trees were strown carpets of hyacinths and wind-blossoms, and from thicket to thicket the merry thrush glanced in and out, and filled his throbbing throat and sang of love and of summer. From morn till night did all God's creatures thank Him for the beautiful days He had given them, and at eve the nightingale made the song which is as old as time and as young as when time itself was young.

Yet for very weariness did Parsifal reck naught o the spring music, but he only journeyed on, steadfast in the might of the Spear ; for he knew that at the appointed time would his Gracious Lord guide his steps back to Monsalvat, his heart enlightened by pity, by which, though he hated sin, he ever loved the sinner. And even on this very morning his perfect work was done, and in naught had he brought shame upon the Holy Spear which shed the precious blood of his dear Lord, and wrought our salvation ; and so had God guided him back to the vale of Monsalvat, though as yet he knew not whither he had come. Once, indeed, he had seen a swan wheeling in blue heaven above him, and a faint chord of memory twanged in his heart and was silent again. Yet he had inward peace, which he would not have exchanged for the wealth of the world nor for the wisdom of Solomon, for it was passing knowledge.

Yet, though all Nature held high festival and rejoiced, little did the brethren of the Holy Grail rejoice with her. For King Titurel, who for long years had lived but in the chapel of the Grail, wondrously kept alive by the feast of Love which

our Saviour instituted, was dead, and even on this day was to be his burial. And his son, King Amfortas, was also nigh to death, for the grievousness of the wound wherewith years agone the magician Klingsor had wounded him; for Amfortas had yielded to sin and to sleep, and while he slept in Klingsor's garden of sorceries the magician had thrust at him with the Sacred Spear, and only by the touch of the Spear could his wound be healed. And as often as Amfortas would essay to unveil to the knights the radiance of the Holy Grail did the wound break out afresh, and thus for long time had they been without that strengthening and refreshing of their souls for the lack of which the King Titurel, starved of that spiritual meat and holy drink, had died.

Very early on this morning came the old knight Gurnemanz from his hermit's hut nigh the sacred spring to look with dim eyes on the beauty of the dawning springtime; and as he looked on the flowering meadows he heard, so he thought, the cry of some wounded animal. 'Yet animal,' said he to himself, 'it can scarcely be; for what four-footed thing grieves like that?' Then searched he in the

thicket by the spring, and found no animal, but the witch-woman Kundry who for long time had not set foot in the kingdom of the Holy Grail. And something of the spring moved in his old bones, and he said to her, 'Awake, Kundry, awake! for the winter is over and past, and spring is here.' Yet she moved not; and when she lay so still he wondered if she were dead, and his soul was sorry for her, since the curse of laughter was still not removed from her. But soon, in answer to his ministrations of pity, she moved and stirred; and when she had come to herself, she got up very quietly, saying only: 'I serve, I serve.' Then she busied herself in his hermit's hut, and fetched fresh water, and plucked rushes for his floor. And he wondered, for he knew not how in the garden of sorceries she had tempted the young lad who came thither, and how he had resisted her wiles, and how from that moment there had entered into her heart the sweet and bitter pain which men call remorse, and which, indeed, is naught else but the voice of our humble Saviour speaking low and lovingly to our hard hearts.

But as Gurnemanz stood and wondered, behold,

there drew near a knight clad in armour from head to foot. In his hand he held a spear, and his feet went wearily. Then did Gurnemanz tell him—for he knew not who it was—that this was the holy and peaceful kingdom of the Grail, where none went armed. And the strange knight answered him not, but he put off his armour, and the spear he set upright in the ground, and knelt down in prayer, raising his eyes to it. Then slowly to the old man came recognition, and he knew what spear that was, and he knew him who bore it—Parsifal.

So when Parsifal had prayed, he rose, and told Gurnemanz of his wanderings and of that sacred thing he bore, and how pity had enlightened him, so that he loved the sinner, yet hated the sin. And now to the kingdom of the Grail he had come again. Then, in turn, he heard of the long sorrows of the knights, and how the strength had gone from them now that they no more beheld the Holy Grail, and that for lack of the sight thereof the old King Titurel was dead. And when he heard that, pity for the sin of the world so seized him that he staggered where he stood, and he lay in swoon near the spring. Then did

the old knight Gurnemanz minister to his faintness; and from his hut came Kundry, who knew Parsifal's helm, and she knew him—that it was he whom she had tempted in Klingsor's garden. But now he rebuffed her not, and she loosened his armour also, and laid it by; and she washed his feet in the spring, and with the hair of her head she dried them. Then Gurnemanz anointed him on the head, and when she had dried his feet Kundry anointed them also, and he rose, and saw the woman, who she was; and Christ Jesus spoke to his heart, and told him that her redemption was near, for her heart was sorry at last. So with water from the spring he baptized her, and bade her trust in her Redeemer. And as he spoke the ice and the laughter in her breast were melted, and with her hair she made a darkness for her eyes, and she wept.

Then, too, were Parsifal's eyes opened, and he looked on the beauty of the spring-time, and talked with Gurnemanz awhile, that even on the day on which the Blessed Lord was crucified it was very fit that all Nature should rejoice, because her trespasses were pardoned, and that since the

great Intercessor Himself pleaded, not the pity of the sacrifice, but the peace which passed understanding, was chiefly shed on the earth.

Yet across the joyous day there now sounded the funeral bells for the King Titurel, and soon the new-anointed King of the Grail took the Sacred Spear and went through the blossoming woods to the chapel of the Grail. There were all the knights assembled; but little gladness was theirs, for they starved for the spiritual meat and holy drink, and for the sight of the Holy Grail, which Amfortas for his wound could not reveal to them. And they cried aloud to him to show them the mystery, and for very agony he could not, but called on them to kill him. Then was brought in for burial the body of Titurel, and for a moment sorrow smote them silent.

And while they were silent there entered one who bore a spear, and there followed him the old knight Gurnemanz and a woman. He went to the couch where Amfortas lay, and with the spear he touched his wound, and the wound was healed. Then turned he to those who bore the curtained Grail and bade them unveil it; and he took the

Holy Grail in his hand, and with his other hand he held the Sacred Spear, and the chapel grew dark, and from the Grail shone out the Salutation of the Lord.

But in the darkness the woman Kundry had crept to his feet, and as the radiance from the Grail grew bright she lifted her eyes to it, and her redemption was accomplished, and she died.

SEPTEMBER

SEPTEMBER

THE barren, sterile emotions which Art gives us, though they have the advantage of harmlessness over the emotions of Life itself, that tree of sweet and bitter fruits, bear with them the inherent defects of their unreality; and whereas there is hardly an emotion of Life which does not leave us stronger and more vivified, there is hardly an emotion of Art where one's senses are stirred, not by actual events of joy or sorrow, but the imagined scenes thereof, which does not leave us flat and unbraced in proportion as the emotion excited has been keen. Love and death, the two great *motifs* on which the drama of Life is based, whether they are whispered on the shivering strings, or piped on remote flutes, or thundered with the blast of trumpets and the clash of cymbals, leave us, when such actual experience has touched us, the richer for it, and stronger and

more vivified. But such is not the case in the reflection of experience which Art gives us; vivid it may be—so vivid, indeed, that reality after it seems shadow-like and unreal—but its life is temporary. We thrill with ecstasies that are not really ours; our soul, in its secret place, sickens with sin or withers with renunciations which are not its own; and when the mimic spectacle is over, and we wake from the storms or sunshine of a coloured dream to a gray morning, and have to take up again the dispiriting thread of uneventful hours, it is with an intolerable sense of flatness that we at first look out over the undistinguished landscape of life. For a week, perhaps, or a fortnight, we have agonized with the throes of Titans; monstrous joys and sorrows have been our portion, and for the monstrous we take up again the minute. We have been burning with alien fires and passions not our own: the temptation of Kundry has shaken us; the sorrow of Wotan, as wide as the world and as bitter as the sea, has for the time been ours; we have been laid to sleep on a mountain-top, like Brunehilde, and, like Siegfried, have dreamed in the green shade of woods until

the voice of Nature has become intelligible, and the twittering of birds articulate through the murmur of the forest. The quintessence of human emotion, in all its terror and beauty, has shaken and enthralled us. Then—then the curtain came down, and we go out again into the real world, which for the time Art has rendered shadow-like, where a hundred petty duties await us, in no way refreshed or strung up for their accomplishment, but impatient, irritated, and bored.

Such, at least, were my own feelings when on a morning I awoke and remembered (what at first seemed incredible) that there was to be no opera that day, and that the curtain was down on the stage at Bayreuth for two years. The little backwater of a town, which on arrival had seemed so instinct with such sweet repose and tranquillity, was insupportable : its tranquillity was the stagnation of decay ; its repose a creeping death-trance, with gray nightmare to ride its rest. Instead of finding that the fiery dreams of the last fortnight had gilded its streets and woven themselves into its gardens and trellises, it appeared to me merely the most dismal little sun-baked suburb I had

ever seen. A glorious lamp had burned there, but the lamp was quenched, and instead of a reflection of its light lingering there, there was only a smell of oil. But the immediate and vital question was what to do and where to go. I could not imagine myself finding existence tolerable anywhere, and least of all, perhaps, could I imagine myself back in England in my own quiet little house in the country town, since for the time being, at any rate, all the minute pleasures which had built up that delightful life and made it so full of happiness were incomprehensible. Not long ago a quiet morning of work, with glances into the garden to see what new plant had flowered, a game of golf over the breezy down, the face of a friend, the hundred details of my life which I have tried to describe in these pages, were overflowingly sufficient to make me more than content. But now there was exasperation in the very multitude of them. And all the time there were, so to speak, images of glorious brightness shut away in some dark place of my brain. The Valkyries were there and Parsifal, Hans Sachs, mellow and unembittered, looked on the love of others and

smiled, and Walter sang of spring-time, and everywhere was melody.

Here, if you please, is egotism *in excelsis*, for I solemnly told myself that, instead of going back home like a sober and average person, I was bound—no less—to go somewhere and to do something by which I could the more fully apprehend and crystallize these images ; and the grounds on which I put this to myself—that is my only excuse—were genuine. For I believe that one of the main duties of man to God and to himself is to realize beauty and understand it, and that one of his main duties to his neighbour is to produce beauty in some shape or form, moral, mental, or physical—if, indeed, there is any real difference between them. The last fortnight had given me new material ; that part of me which is capable in its small way of feeling beauty had been shown wonderful things. If I went back home to the ordinary routine of daily life, I felt that I should not only do my part in it exceedingly ill, but also that the monotony and triviality of it would tarnish and dull the brightness of my new possessions. In other words, I began—a solemn

prig—to think about my artistic temperament, and make plans for its well-being. And that confession made—in the hope that *Qui s'accuse s'excuse* in some small degree—the mind-narrative can go on its way. My body—after an effusion of telegrams—sped South to the house of a friend in Capri, where it arrived two days later.

Here in this remote island, separated by a few leagues of sea only from that vividly modern and restless place called Naples, can be recaptured without effort something of the early days of the world, and from the steamer one steps out of all the responsibilities and codes which the stupidity and wickedness of mankind have built up, into paganism and fairyland. The gray walls compounded of priggishness and puritanism (yet knitted together with the mortar of good intentions and morality) with which this civilized century has fortressed itself fall as the walls of Jericho fell at the blast of the trumpet, and there is left sunlight and sea and the beauty of the seven days of creation, which was pronounced by God to be good.

The red, waxlike flowers of the pomegranate are

in full bloom, and as evening falls they glow like hot coals over the rough stone walls that bound the path up to Capri, where the green lizards slip in and out. The smell of the vines is in the air, heavy and warm, and once or twice as I walked through the dusky trellises my heart hammered in me, for I knew that but a little more and I should see Dionysus himself, with the vine-leaves in his hair, and delicate hand holding the cup that brimmed with purple; and at noonday often have I all but seen in the briar-decked clefts of rock the great god Pan himself, to the music of whose fluting the whole world dances. Up and down their steep paths, with head erect beneath the wine-jars, walk the maidens of Capri, and something of Aphrodite lives in their wine-painted faces and moulded bosoms; and young Apollo, bare-footed and splashed to the knee in the trodden vats, strips the nut-husks off with his gleaming teeth, and looks at the passer-by with brown soft eye. He has pushed a pomegranate flower behind his ear, and his shirt is open, so that the smooth brown breast is seen. What thoughts fill day by day that gay, lazy Italian brain? He is not

religious, although he goes to Mass most regularly, for from Mass he passes back again to paganism; and he only goes there because he is a child and is vaguely afraid—or would be if he did not go to Mass—of what the priests have told him about a remote bogie—for so God seems to him—who can make him burn in unquenchable fires if he does not. Nor does he weary his mind with any question of morality or code of ethics: the sun is warm to him, or, if the sun be hot, the shade is cool, and the almond fruit is sweet, and the fumes of the fermenting vats mysteriously exciting, and the maiden with whom he is in treaty to wed very fair and loving, and her dowry is good. And for the passer-by he has his bright smile, and the expression of his hope that I have enjoyed my bathe. No, he has not bathed to-day, for the work of the vintage is heavy, and he is paid by the hour. Ah, a cigarette? The signor is too kind. Will not the signor take his pomegranate flower? Indeed the signor will.

Day by day this sunny and innocent paganism gets more possession of me, and day by day the beauty of that which I saw at Bayreuth

glows more brightly. Yesterday, about evening, a sudden summer squall came storming over from Posillippo, gleaming with lightning and riotous with thunder, and to me it was Wotan who steered from the north. On Monte Solaro the Valkyries awaited his coming, and when the whistling winds had passed away over our heads, while the house shuddered, and the moon again rose in a velvet sky with stars swarming thick round her, I knew that on the mountain-top Brunehilde slept within a ring of fire, waiting for the man who should claim her with his kiss. But the morning again to-day was very clear and hot, and instead of going up Mount Solaro, as I had intended, I went, as usual, down to the Bagno, a white pebbly beach with pockets of sand to lie on. I took with me a basket of figs and a flask of wine stoppered with vine-leaves, and my friend took a book which we often read and a straw case of cigarettes. And together we swam through the chrysoprase of sunlit sea far out to a brown, sea-weed-covered rock. The water was very deep round it, and fathoms down something shone very brightly with wavering, subaqueous gleam, and,

half laughing at myself, I dived and dived—for I knew it was the Rhinegold that shone there—until I could dive no more. Yet still I could not get deep enough. Then, having rested, we swam back, and lay on pockets of hot sand, and drank from the leaf-stoppered bottle, and ate the purple of the figs ; and my friend read in the book which he had brought, beginning at the seventh chapter, and to this effect :

' Did I seriously believe that that contemplation of God which is the prime duty laid on us by religion must, or even could, legitimately give us any touch of sadness of whatever kind, I would throw religion away as heedlessly as I throw away the end of a smoked-out cigarette, for I have no use for it. Yet although on every side, and most of all in every pulpit, I see the lamentable Puritan jowl, and hear the lamentable Puritan whine, which bids me look with horror on the sin of the world and with sorrow on its sufferings, I do not for a moment believe that this impious gabble is the result of religion, but rather of grossest irreligion, on the part of its exponents. For me, I know that the contemplation of God is my duty, and if

I make it my whole and absorbing duty I cannot go very far astray. For above all things is God love, and above all things is He beauty, and the love which engirdles Him joins without break to the human love which it is our duty always to give and take, giving with both hands and taking by the armful. So, too, His beauty joins without break to the beauty of all He has made, and in the golden hair of women and in the rose-petal, in the smooth swift limbs of youth and in the faceted diamond, in the curve of a girl's lips and in the rose-flushed clouds, in the blue chalice of the sky of morning, equally and everywhere must we look for and absorb the beauty which is implanted there.

'It is here that Christianity, with its mournful, man-invented morality, has gone so far astray from its Founder that many Christians turn from beauty as if beauty was evil, instead of ever seeking it and worshipping it, find it where they will, until the dross of their gross minds is burned up in that fine fire. Hence, too, sprang — by "hence," I mean from impious Puritanism—such phrases as the "temptations and dangers of physical beauty," whereas to the man whose mind is set on God it

is by and through beauty that the uttermost death-stroke is dealt to the writhing earthworm of carnalism. For the truth is that no beauty of soul, and no completeness, was ever framed on the mutilation or starvation of self, and at the Last Day the gray and pallid ascetic will find that what he thought was virtue, and what he taught as self-control, was sheer darkness of soul and purblind vision.

'It is this that must be cast away. We are people that sit in darkness, content that our religion should make us sad, and as such we have a lesson humbly to learn from paganism, and in particular from the paganism of the Greeks, whose hierarchy of gods were enthroned in brightness, and the name thereof was Beauty. And that Beauty, the search of which to them was worship and prayer and praise, they found everywhere: in the sunlight and the blue dome of heaven; in the crisp, curly acanthus leaf which they set to twine about the capitals of their marble-hewn columns and on the necks of the vases of the dead; in the radiance of jewels and in the tragedies of heroes; and above all in the beauty of the human form. Disfigured and astray

their worship often went, and it wore strange garbs, but through all its sin and its misconceptions, its thousand errors and distortions, we can see gleaming, deep below, the bright shining of its truth. And this, to my mind, gleams less brightly in the sadder worship of to-day.

'For I doubt very much whether anybody is in the least benefited by the actual sorrow or repentance of anyone, though no doubt such—especially to sour and brooding natures—is necessary. But the best repentance, if one has sufficient vitality, will be momentary, a fiery sword-thrust, which will leave no ache or throb behind. It is better, I dare say, that a man should suffer the fires of remorse for years rather than that he should not suffer them at all, but I think that the man who is capable of throwing his remorse off and starting fresh and unwounded is the more Godlike creature, for the reason that it is infinitely better to be happy and smiling than to go frowning through the world. For sin is seldom born of a happy impulse, stare as you may, unless from a happy impulse which has been, so to speak, shut up in the dark and has gone putrid.

'And here in this divine place' (the book I am quoting from was written at Athens), 'where beauty is thrown broadcast over all one sees, and happiness is so easy, it seems to me to follow as a corollary that things which a Northern and gloomy people consider wrong are less wrong. For supposing in foggy London every shopkeeper tried to cheat one, one would say that the middle class was going to the dogs. Quite so—it would be. But the middle class is not in the least going to the dogs here. Why not? For a variety of reasons: partly because there is more sun here and no fog, and because the Parthenon is near at hand. Ah, yes, indeed it is so: Gaiety covers a multitude of sins, and while they are covered, Beauty blots them out.

'O beautiful God of this beautiful world, let me make somebody laugh to-day. Amen.'

At that point I laughed.

'So his prayer is heard,' said my friend. 'Have you eaten all the figs while I have been reading?'

'Yes; but don't be unhappy. Remember it is your duty to be happy. You may have the last cigarette. No—we'll toss for it.'

'I'll be shot if we do!' said he.

'Well, I'll cut it in half.'

'So that neither of us gets any,' said he. 'Give it me;' and he very rudely snatched at it. Here ensued a scuffle, and, the bowels of the cigarette being scattered about the beach, neither of us got any, and the occasion gave rise to moral reflections. Also immoral ones. Then peace and plenty descended in the shape of a friend also coming down to bathe with a supply of fresh tobacco, and the sun was warm again and the sea blue. Then my friend (whom I must call Toby, because he objects to his real name being known, saying that I am certain to keep all the beautiful remarks for myself and give him all the idiocy) held forth:

'The man is shallow,' he said; 'it is only a gospel of surfaces he preaches, and you think it profound merely because he loads it with grave words. I have done for years exactly what he preaches: I have succeeded in being always happy and usually gay, and I spend my whole life in looking for what I consider beautiful. Yet what did you call me last night? A second-hand sensualist, I think.'

'Very likely. That is because you are not strenuous. Your pursuit of beauty must be passionate, and the pursuit must be an act of worship. Your pursuit of beauty is not an act of worship; it is more like sucking sweets.'

Toby laughed loudly and idiotically.

'Or eating all the figs,' said he, and the discussion ended.

It is close on noon, and only the faintest breeze is stirring. The bay is silent and waveless, except that at intervals a ripple falls like the happy sigh of some beautiful basking creature on to the hot, white pebbles of the beach. There, like a living sapphire, lies the dear sea, the thing in this world I love best and understand best, though I do not understand it at all. Never have I seen it so luminous as it is to-day; you would say that the sunlight of centuries had been lit in its depths. Gray rocks run out from the precipitous land, fringed with seaweed, and under the water the seaweed shows purple. A brown-sailed fishing-boat lies becalmed a mile out, and across the bay Naples sparkles white and remote, and only the thin line of smoke streaming upwards from

Vesuvius speaks of the fierce and everlasting stir of forces which underlie the world. In the thickets which come down to the water's edge of this tideless sea there is now no sound of life, though an hour ago they were resonant with the whirring of the cicalas. The lizards have crept out in the stillness and bask on the white stones, as still as if once more Orpheus charmed them ; and high above me a hawk, with wings motionless, floats slowly, in seeming sleep, down some breeze in the upper air.

And what if my nameless author is right? What if—this is the upshot—happiness is our first duty? It is certainly not true that if you are good you are happy ; but may it not be true that by being happy you are in some degree good? The Puritan interpretation of Christianity has had a fair trial, and, indeed, it seems to have made but a poor job out of it. What is the result of all these sadnesses and renunciations? Nothing but starved lives and unrealized ideals. Such self-denial is touching, beautiful in theory, and based, of course, on Christ's teaching. But it is based awry if it brings sadness with it, if it sees in

beauty only a lure to lead the soul astray, rather than the signpost which points by no winding road, but a royal highway, straight to God. And that road resounds with praise, and the birds of St. Francis sit in the pleasant boughs of the trees that grow beside it, and the dear saint smiles at them, and says: 'Sing, my sisters, and praise the Lord.' And at his bidding they fill their throats with bubbling song, and thank God for their warm feathers and the green habitations He has builded for them. Then St. Francis, so the legend tells us, sits down at table with St. Blaise and others, the friends of St. Francis, and feeds his dear birds, so that they become very strong. That saint is more to my mind than that foolish fellow Stylites, or the dour St. Bernard, who, being plagued with the flies on a hot day, excommunicated them, and they all dropped down dead. For love, joy, and peace are the gifts of the Spirit, but we are too much given to let the joy take care of itself, to check it even, as if salvation was clothed in sackcloth.

Happiness is a home product. We cannot im-

port it into ourselves, nor by multiplying our pleasures can we come one whit nearer to it. But by being dull, by being slow to perceive, or having perceived to receive, we can, and we often do, succeed in closing the doors of our souls to it. Yet, though it comes not from without, nor is it the sum or product of any pleasures, our soul must sit with doors and windows open to catch if it be but one-millionth of the myriad sweet and beautiful things that stir and shine about us, or else, as in the darkness and stagnation of some closed house, dust and airlessness overlay us. For there is nothing in the world, except only that which the sin and folly of man have wrought, which is not wholesome and innocent. It is our grossness which makes things gross, our rebellion which makes us say that in beauty there lurk any seeds or germs that can ripen into or go to form anything that is not beautiful.

'O world as God has made it, all is beauty,
And knowing this is love, and love is duty :
What further can be sought for or declared ?'

* * * * *

Seraphina and Francesco, with outside help when they want it, are the domestic staff of Toby's house. They are engaged to be married, and, in fact, the marriage is going to come off in three months' time. Domestically speaking, this is an ideal arrangement, because if Seraphina's work happens on any day to be heavy (she cooks, though I cannot call her a cook) Francesco delights to help her; while, on the other hand, if her work is light, she lends her aid in the cleaning and embellishment of the house, for thus she is with her *promesso.* And in the evening, as often as not, when their work is finished, they stroll and sit in the garden as we do, and with a little encouragement join in our talk, and tell us the strange legends of the saints common to this countryside, or with bated breath speak of the days of the Emperor Tiberius, who still is the bogie of the island, so that a mother even to-day, if a child is troublesome, warns it that Tiberius is coming. High on the eastward end of Capri stand the ruins of one of his palaces; the walls are built to the sheer edge of the precipitous rock, and it was from here that he used to hurl down

his victims when he was satiated with them, flinging them headlong, a glimmer of white limbs that turned over and over in the air till they splashed on the rocks three hundred feet below. Round this crag still hovers some poisonous breath of crime; sudden shrieks are heard of nights, so Francesco says, and shadows pace in the shadows. Here, too, that dark soul used to walk up and down in his corridor of mirrors, so that he could see that none came up behind him with the assassin's knife; weary of life, he yet clung to it with a maniac force; longing for death, he fenced himself from it with a thousand guards. 'And on us,' said Francesco, when he told us of these things, with the poet that lurks in the Italian blood suddenly inspiring his tongue —'on us, signor, those same stars look down that beheld Tiberius. Yet they do not care.'

In this manner we were sitting in the garden on the evening of the day which I have been speaking of. There had been some small *festa* in the town, and Seraphina, to make herself the more comely in her lover's eyes, had put on, when her kitchen work was over, her *festa* clothes, even

though they would only glimmer for an hour in the dusk, before she went to bed. Her olive skin, flushed with the warm tints of wind and sun, was dusky in the moonlight, and her brown eyes, underneath her thin, straight eyebrows, were big and soft, as if made of velvet. But all the gaiety of the South was set in her laughing mouth, and her teeth were a band of ivory in the red of pomegranate. Her arms were bare above the elbows almost to the shoulder, and beneath the smooth satiny skin, as she moved them in Southern gesticulation at some story she was telling us, I could see the swift and supple play of the muscles. Round us the night was pricked with a thousand remote stars, and the warm, languid air stirred in the bushes and sighed among the vineyards like a lingering caress. Now and then a handful of hot air would be tossed over us from the veranda, where the sun had grilled the flagstones all the afternoon; now and then a breath of coolness—a handful of air that had been shaded all day by the thick vine-leaves—stirred from its place and refreshed us. Below gleamed the lights of Capri, and the murmur of the town

stole softly to us, or a gay stanza would be flung into the air from some homeward-going peasant as he passed up the cobbled ways. To the north a great emptiness of gray showed where the Gulf of Naples basked beneath the moon, and high up on the horizon a thin necklace of light lying along the edge of the sea showed the town. This hour of warm night, especially with such a setting, is, to my mind, the most animal of all. In the moon-dusk a thousand subtle scents and hints float round one, not consciously perceived, but exciting to the primeval animal instincts which æons of evolution have not yet eradicated from our nature; and at such an hour the beast within us, prowling, predatory, hot on its slinking errands, is more than ever dominant.

Soon Toby got up, stretching himself.

'Mail-day to-morrow,' he said, 'and I have two letters to write. Just get me some paper and envelopes, Francesco; there were none this morning.'

Francesco jumped up.

'Eh, signor, I forgot,' he said; 'there are none in the house. I will run over to Capri; the shops

are still open. Two minutes only;' and he vaulted over the wall into the road.

Toby strolled towards the house.

'Are you coming in?' he said to me over his shoulder.

'Yes, in ten minutes,' I answered, and he disappeared.

Seraphina rose also, resting her weight for a moment on her arm.

'It is good beneath the stars in the evening, is it not?' she said. 'I must go in. Happy dreams, signor!'

'No; tell me one more story about Tiberius,' I said.

She laughed.

'Surely the signor is like a child,' she said: 'he is so fond of stories. Will he not tell me an English story for a change?'

'About what?'

'About yourself or your friends—about your customs in England. I like the ways of English folk;' and she sat down again close to me, eager-eyed, with smiling mouth.

Suddenly it seemed to me that the whole spirit

of all I saw and felt was changed. The soft, innocent Southern night was alive with voices. No longer did a child sit by me, but a woman—dark-eyed like a stag, intoxicating to the sense. Passion and desire, those headlong twins, rushed down on me, with arms intertwined and purple-stained mouth, chanting with a meaning that was new to me, 'All is beauty, and knowing this is love; and love——' There she sat, exquisite, trembling between girlhood and womanhood, the eternal riddle of life, to solve which men have gladly died, and lightly dismissed honour, like a stale piece of unlikely gossip. But——

'It is mail-day to-morrow,' I said, and I heard how unsteady was my voice; 'I also have letters to write.'

She rose at once.

'Good-night, signor,' she said, and turned to go to the house.

As she got further on her way, I think I would have given all I had for her to turn back again, so that I might say—well, nothing particular, but just let her guess, no more, that—— But she did not turn.

So, then, what of my gospel about beauty? It remains exactly where it was, true, I believe, in every respect. Only in me, at any rate, there lurks the beast. To-night he growled and pulled at his chain.

OCTOBER

OCTOBER

I AM come back again to the level uneventfulness of these pleasant days with a great sense of having 'come home' continually with me. This little stuccoed house with its little garden has become to me my *angulus terræ;* the deep vibration of 'home,' incommunicable, and to many unmeaning, is here; I can no longer imagine myself permanently anywhere else. All day long I continually find, as it were, intimate glances: the line of the downs, a group of trees, or a corner of my own room catches my eye as one catches the eye of a friend across a roomful of acquaintances. That glance says nothing in particular—it only means 'I am I, you are you'—but it is only between friends that such a glance can ever pass; soul beckons to soul with gesture invisible to others, and a smile answers it, for it is friends who are our anchor in this swift-rushing stream of days

and years: secure there, though time eddies in froth and flying spray about our bows, it does not whirl us away, straw and flotsam, down the racing flood. And above us, when we look up from our anchorage through the flying wrack of storm-cloud and torn fringes of wind-swept vapour, there glimmer the steadfast and immutable stars.

I left Capri, as you will have guessed, somewhat in a hurry; in fact, I firmly and speedily ran away as hard as I could. All September, so I see now, I had been living in the flimsiest paradise of a fool. I had thought it was possible to detach one's self so utterly from the joys and frailties of the human race that one could take any liberties one chose, look at and live in beauty, and cease to be man. Then suddenly the flesh twitched me, and like the flowers of Klingsor's garden my sexless paradise fell in red ruin of autumn leaf about my ears. For me, anyhow, such a paradise was not possible, and I had—only just—the sense to see that it was better to live decently and dully than—otherwise.

So I took ship at Naples and came home by sea,

for why one should shut one's self up in a grilling box of scarlet velvet and grind along a steel path to the din of rolling wheels, when the divine waterways are at the door, is more than I ever could imagine. Two moments of the voyage I shall never forget.

Out in the Bay of Biscay we had a couple of days of heavy gale, the wind blowing from the west like a solid thing. The sea, which till then had been calm, gradually began to get up. There was no sun, and from a gray and infinite flatness it grew streaked and wrinkled. Then the wrinkles began to amalgamate, every two or three wrinkles turning themselves into one definite furrow, and the streaks formed themselves into sprayed wave-caps. When I went to bed the ship was still fairly steady, but full of wandering creaks and groans, and clothes hanging up on my cabin walls whispered against the woodwork and oscillated backwards and forwards. During the night, however, we began to pitch and roll in earnest, and, waking once, I heard the scream of the screw whirling impotently out of water, and the jar of straining wood and rivets. All next

day the riot of the skies and din of the seas grew greater, until, coming on to deck after dinner, one had to dash at suitable moments over the open to gain handhold before the next lurch. Eventually I found a corner sheltered from the wind behind the smoking-room, and sat there with the gale thundering madly above my head and yelling and thrumming in the quivering rigging. The sky was quite clear and cloudless, and though there was no moon the stars made a gray twilight overhead. As the ship laboured on with reeling gait, the mast near above me would strike wildly right and left through a hundred stars, scoring a black line through the Pleiades and the Bear. For a moment Orion's belt would be framed between the yard-arms, the next it would plunge out of sight behind me. Then Cassiopeia's chair would waver over the bulwarks, tremulously perched, and in a second, as if it was roped to some celestial swing, would soar high to the zenith. Then the bulwarks themselves would rise a black blot into the sky; the next moment they reeled giddily downwards, and at my feet almost there raced by huge dimnesses of gray sea and flying foam with

veiled and luminous specks of phosphorescent light glimmering like marine glow-worms.

Then suddenly from the deck below came a cry I have heard only once, 'Man overboard!' and in a moment—coming, it seemed, from nowhere—the deck was alive with hurrying figures. The thump of the screw grew slow and ceased, women screamed, and from a big chest near me three sailors got out a flare-buoy—a wooden frame with a light attached to it. In a few seconds it was lit and flung overboard, and flaring high it rose and fell, a veritable dance of death, among the hills and valleys of the sea. It was impossible at the pace we were going to reverse the engines at once, for the strain would have endangered the lives of all on the ship; but gradually as we slowed down this was done, and the churned water from the screws hissed past us. The buoy was already far behind us, but gradually we got nearer to it, and a boat was launched with infinite difficulty and danger, and we lay there, the ship's company hanging on the lee bulwarks while it put out into the night and the storm. There we waited, rolling and bowing to the waves

for an hour maybe, watching the flare and the light from the boat now riding high against the horizon, now completely vanishing in the trough of some wave. Then the flare burned out, and the boat returned. The search had been fruitless. And slowly the thump of the screw worked its way to its accustomed speed. The identity of the man was established, an entry was made, and we went on again ever faster through the yellow twilight of the stars and the big, pitiless sea.

The second moment was next morning. The wind had gone down, though the sea still ran high, and all heaven and earth were one incredible blue. A sun of transcendent brilliance flamed overhead, and not a cloud flecked the huge azure dome. Below the great translucent waves were at play in jovial boisterousness; the blue monsters flung themselves against the black side of the ship and were shattered into a cloud of dazzling white, which as it rose into the air was momently iridescent with rainbow—a high-day of delight. About eleven of the morning a sudden whisper and rumour ran round the ship, and by degrees

the sequel of that tragic hour last night was made known. The wife of the man who had fallen overboard the night before was with child, and the shock had brought on a premature delivery, and she had died. But the child lived, and in all probability would do well. So June had its tale repeated again, and when the weighted shroud slid into that ocean of brightness, wavered sub-aqueously and disappeared, I could have sworn for a moment that a sudden waft of the smell of sweet-peas pierced the pungency of the sea.

So both lie there in the depths of the unquiet Bay, though leagues apart. Will those two poor tabernacles of mortality, I cannot but wonder, find some subtle mode of telegraphy in their green sea-caves, and speak to each other, or go to each other across the ooze of the depths, moved by some thresh of current? Or will they have to wait there patiently in their crystal tombs till the sea gives up its dead, and they float up as the chrysalis of the dragon-fly floats up through the water, to find that the new heaven and the new earth are fair at the dawning of the supreme day? Such was the incident of my home-coming: in

the midst of life there was death, and in the midst of death, life. It is always so.

The long, dark evenings are beginning, but day after day unclouded October weather, with its brisk air and its exquisite clarity and luminousness, prevails. It reminds one of nothing in the world so much as a boy's soprano; nothing else in the world gives one the sense of such absolute perfection and purity of vehicle—the one expressed in terms of light, the other of sound. And as the boy's voice rises and fills the great spaces of some sunlit cathedral, so this light pervades these aisles of yellowing trees and spaces of swelling downland. About each there is the same piercing, pervading quality; about each there is an utter absence of all passion or emotion. A woman's voice, it seems to me, is like the mature light of summer, broad, full of feeling, full of the tenderness of sex. But in this October weather you have mere brightness; in the air there is a certain chill, which gives the precision that the warm, flower-blurred light of summer lacks. It promises nothing like the languors and brightnesses of

spring, it gives no fulfilment like the noons of summer; it is just itself—exquisite, meaningless, and at times horribly sad. For the year has turned; we have had our bright and our beautiful times, and they are over, and soon will be the season of long, dark evenings; and the blear-eyed peerings of the remote sun through the fogs of November. In the winter, too, there is something of the hibernating spirit about us; we dream and doze, and vitality sometimes burns a little low, and age looks over our shoulder, and we tend to be possessed with the Spirit of the falling leaf.

Now, the Spirit of the falling leaf is a most unprofitable demon. To dwell on the thought of decay and age and death cannot, I believe, be salutary for anybody. *Pereunt et imputantur.* That motto, surely, was written by an atheist and an idiot. For, in the first place, the hours that go so swiftly by do not perish—each hour that passes goes to form the present; what we did or were then is exactly that which makes us what we are now. And if we are to seriously give our minds to the contemplation of what is written up against us in the ledger-book of the hours that have

passed, we shall, if we have any conscience at all, only secure for ourselves paralysis in the future. No decently-minded man, if he dwells on his missed opportunities with any honesty, can possibly raise his head again. A lively repentance sets its face steadily forwards, never backwards.

This Spirit of the falling leaf is my especial foe, and I detest him with all the fervour of familiarity. Every autumn he whispers to me, 'Look at the trees from which the yellow leaves are falling slowly, slowly, but steadily. Soon they will be quite bare; their summer is over, a year is gone. But they will renew their youth in the spring, the green buds will burst again, and June will laugh among the revivified branches, and the birds will again make there a melodious habitation. But no spring will renew you; each year you are older; your spring is past, and your summer days will not come again.' And I turn cold.

Now, though the Spirit of the falling leaf may speak the truth, that is one of the truths which it is our duty steadily to ignore. What is past is past; but to-day, at any rate, lies in front of us; to-day is our immediate and vital concern, and if

we are fortunate enough to live till to-morrow, to-morrow will be our vital concern. No, to talk with the Spirit of the falling leaf is to invite paralysis of the soul. It is wise to guard against such paralysis by that simple antidote which is within the reach of everybody, and its name is Work.

> 'How well I know what I mean to do
> When the long dark autumn evenings come!'

There speaks the healthful man. Browning set himself to read Greek, prose, he tells us, not poetry now, for he was old. Yet so green and full of immortal youth were his years, that in his reverie, dwelling on the past, no falling-leaf dirge comes to his lips, but the passionate lyric rapture of love relived. But the point just now is that when the autumn evenings were near he gave himself a task, set himself to do something, opened a bottle of the only real tonic the world contains, which is work. And most of us certainly need that tonic more in winter than in summer. In summer the mere fact that we sit at the great banquet of the spectacle of sun and

flowers and green things is royal entertainment. But the year turns, the lights burn lower, and we have to employ ourselves; but, like children in the dark, we quake at the gathering shadows.

What one sets one's self to do matters nothing in comparison of the main point, namely, that we set ourselves to do something, for any employment, so long as it is not harmful, is essentially good. Many of us have our ordinary work to do, which takes most of the day now days are short. In the summer, perhaps, we were accustomed, when the day's work was over, to be out-of-doors; but now, in these lengthening nights, we have to seek our employment inside. The great thing, then, is to do something definite, and to do it seriously. To read the whole of Shakespeare before next March is one employment that recommends itself to me, but supposing the choice was made for me by another, who told me that bridge was to be my winter employment, I should be quite content. But in that case I should try very hard to get rid by March of the fatal indecision which prompts one sometimes to make spades, sometimes no trumps, out of practically the same hand. I should try to

establish once and for all the best suit to play if my partner doubles no trumps. I should try to find out definitely what chance of success certain heavy finesses have, and act accordingly, and I should consider that I had wasted my winter if by next March I had not improved out of recognition. But what I hope I should not do would be to play slackly, for in that case one might as well talk to the Spirit of the falling leaf at once.

Meantime October is to me personally the month when I am most beset by this spirit, for October is full of the sweet and tender memories of certain people, very near to me, who are dead. Two days in particular stand out, of which one was spent on the sea on my return from Naples, and the other, October 27, will be here in a few days. On that day the psalm for the evening, you will remember, is 'When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion.' It was the anthem, you know, in Winchester Cathedral on the night when Henry Esmond returned, when his 'dear mistress' looked up and saw the sunshine round his head as they sang 'bringing their sheaves with them.' And she came to him and blessed him.

That immortal scene has in my own mind got so intertwined with my own memories of the 27th of October that I cannot disentangle them. Twice, I remember, I saw Margery again after a long absence on the 27th, and with the tender memory of one who is dead there always wreathes itself the other association of the return of someone beloved. Dimly, as if the future would fulfil some dream of years ago, I picture some great joy coming to me on that day. I think that on that day I shall return from some captivity, and find that my life has been but a dream in the light of what shall be ; that I shall have a joyful reaping —God knows what or how—for certain seed I have sown in tears ; that some empty granary in my heart shall be made full of golden grain.

September was a month of 'mellow fruitfulness' in England, and I have returned to find my garden gone rampant. Somehow growth in autumn is utterly unlike summer growth in its wild opulence, as if the dear plants knew that it was nearly time for them to go to bed, but were determined to have one great romp first. A huge nasturtium, like a boisterous schoolboy, has sprung

on to a Gloire de Dijon and is wrestling with it. A canariensis which I thought was finished has played hide-and-seek all over the trellis of the shelter until it met a wandering eccremocarpus, which it instantly embraced like a long-lost brother, and the sunshine of the flowers of the one is mixed with the orange trumpet of the other. Phloxes are still in flower, sunflowers have topped the garden wall, and the beautiful sylvestris is vigorous with pale leaf and snowy flower. But—only fancy—that vile Jackmanni is dead. Quite dead. God forgive it for a senseless fool.

These golden October days! Every morning I stray out before breakfast, sometimes only into the garden, sometimes as far as the water-meadows, to find the same glorious return of day. This morning the least pallor of hoar-frost was on the grass, and the clean smell of the morning was more exquisite than all the perfumes of Arabia. A tall chestnut had grown very suddenly yellow —how delightful if our hair turned brilliant gold (it does sometimes) when we grew old!—and the leaves were dropping one by one, without twist or

turn, in the calm air, till a heap of unminted gold lay underneath the tree. Every now and then there was a thump on the grass, and the green rind of the chestnut fruit, split by the blow, jerked out its smooth and glossy globes. The chalk-streams flowing through the meadows were full and brimming, streams of living water, and the luxuriant grasses, grown to their longest, swam and dabbled in the flawless crystal. How good it was to breathe the chill of the morning, to look across the emerald of the meadows to the red town in the hollow, full of clustering roofs, over which the mists lay thin and level, pricked by the gray towers and solemn steeples which show golden in the clearness of the upper air! Then back to breakfast, and to this long quiet morning of work by the open window, interrupted only by the rapturous contemplation of a man in the road trying to drive a tandem. The leaders thought otherwise and went in different directions.

* * * * *

To-day is the 26th, and the march of these golden days has been suddenly interrupted. Last night I awoke to hear a great wind rattling at the

panes, and snoring and fluting in the chimneys; and this morning, instead of the yellow sunshine, I find a gray and tattered sky of low storm-clouds, and sheets of driving rain flung against the windows. The flowers in the garden cower beneath the stinging lashes of water, and weep their petals silently away. A tree was blown down in the night not far from the house—an elm growing in a hedgerow—and a cruel gaping wound of torn earth has opened, with the fibres of the root like tortured and exposed nerves standing out into the air. For thirty yards round the field is littered with the pitiful débris—torn branches, bunches of leaf, even a couple of bird's-nests. For it, poor soul! autumn has been the end of life, and spring will not build it anew.

All day the streaming heavens weep their violent and blinding tears, and the loud gale fills me with vague and intolerable apprehension. Like a lost soul it moans round the corners of the house, and through the cracks of the closed windows it whistles in descending and ascending chromatic scale. Now and then there comes a lull, but again it breaks out in a hooting maniac

chorus, as if Bedlam were loose. The tattoo of the rain on the glass joins in the hurly-burly, and the swish and gurgle of the water down the roof-pipes lends a chuckling evil accompaniment. It is intolerable; there is the pain of hell and a certain hellish glee in this scream and riot. It is as if some lost soul cried aloud from its agony, yet exulted in its disobedience to God's law. 'Punish me, punish me!' it seems to say; 'never will I repent. It was You who made me, You who let my path on earth be hedged about with snare and temptation, and when I fall into the pits You have allowed to be digged, You say that I have sinned, and for that sin I burn in the fires of hell. But are You more at Your ease on the golden throne before the crystal sea? You will forgive me if I repent? A thousand thanks. But I will never repent, and I will never forgive You.'

Hell is loose, and swarms round me. The poor souls whom the Will of God caused to be made—have they not a right to resent their birth, if they are born to pain only and hopeless struggling? And if for a while they forget the evil plight into which they by no fault of theirs

have been born, by tasting pleasures which a code —to them merely arbitrary—has labelled sinful, by what justice shall they be punished? Human justice at least would be less merciless. Is it just to make a frail thing like a man, place him in the midst of temptation, and then punish him because he falls? Supposing I buy a doll at a toy shop, and place it insecurely on the edge of a table and it falls off, is it just that I should then whip it? Or go a step further, and grant that I can endow that doll with consciousness, *so that it has an existence separate from mine*—may I whip it then? Is it not the most elementary justice that I should respect the free-will with which I have endowed it? But if it has a consciousness which is yet not separate from mine, then I punish myself if I punish it for transgressing laws which are of my own making. I, in fact, have transgressed my own laws. In that case I had better repeal them.

Now, possession of the devil is a very real thing, and though I hold that in the majority of cases—they occur to each one of us every day —the best thing to do is to run away if you possibly can, not stop and argue, there are

occasions, and this seemed to me to be one, where you cannot run away, for you are with your back to the wall, and have to fight. So I fought, and I am glad to be able to say that the devil was sorry he spoke. For, as always, he is a very shallow fellow, and though with his loud words—the gale to help him outside—he had seemed very convincing for the moment, I think I never heard a sorrier argument than his. He suggests, so I take it, the repeal of all moral laws: the binding force of them is to vanish. What will happen then? The child crossing the street will be driven over by the first carriage, and left to lie there with broken limbs till the next ends its torture. I shall go out of my house to-morrow and be clubbed by two men, who will rob me, who in turn will be clubbed and robbed by three. In ten days—I wager my immortal soul on this—the kingdoms of the world will be entirely in the hands of a dozen men, all strong, all fearing each other, and desiring to get rid of each other. For reasons of self-preservation they will sign a contract that they will not kill, injure, or rob each other. Moral law has therefore begun again, for

it is necessary for the preservation of human life. Next day they will sign another contract to protect their women and children, and before the year is out they will have found it necessary to have in force every human moral law that exists to-day. If it were not so, those laws could never have existed. Once more the spirit of good triumphs over the spirit of evil. God does not punish us; it is our own punishment which we inflict on ourselves each time that we, in ever so slight a degree, do anything which tends towards that chaos which must exist without morality.

* * * * *

The gale has blown itself tired, and now, as I stand on the doorstep about midnight, looking out, an extraordinary peace prevails. The moon is high in heaven, bare of clouds, and the air is utterly calm and windless. It seemed to me impossible only a few hours ago that so serene a tranquillity should succeed the wild riot of to-day. And steadfast remain the stars; they have not, as seemed almost inevitable, been blown, like those heaps of dead leaves, about the floor of the skies, so that one quarter was bare, while in another the

Pleiades had been blown against the Twins, and Orion sat on Cassiopeia's chair.

* * * * *

The morning of the 27th was of the same pellucid serenity as the midnight before. The trees were much barer than they had been twenty-four hours before, and the inimitable tracery of the branches against the sky was outlined with the precision of the South. The sun was extraordinarily warm, and I sat out for an hour in the morning to the chuckling of birds in the bushes and an unread paper. Then in the afternoon I went to the cathedral for the evening service.

* * * * *

It has happened. For years past, as you know, I have felt certain it would happen on this day, and when it happened I knew it could not have been otherwise. Thus:

The service was at half-past three, and I got to he cathedral, I suppose, some five minutes before it began, and was given a stall on the south side. Through the windows behind me the sun streamed low—nearly level—for it was not far from its setting, and I lived over again a certain October 27,

years ago, when I got home too late, and knew that one of the sweetest and dearest souls that ever lived on earth had gone home. It was just such a day as this, bright and unclouded, and even then, on the day itself, I felt it wholly impossible to be sad. It was all right with the world, then as always, and God, as always, was in His heaven. We walked all together—those of us who were left—through the woods, and it was right and meet that the sun shone, and that we recalled and spoke of her merriness, and were ourselves merry with the memory. Then my two strange meetings with Margery, also on this day, intertwined themselves with the other : it was a day of home-coming.

At this point I became aware that I could not have been attending to the service, for automatically, with the rest of the congregation, I rose from my knees for the Psalms. No chant was played over, but a long pedal note from the organ vibrated in the carved stalls, and at the first chord the choir began. And they sang, 'When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, then were we like unto them that dreamed.' I did not need to

open the big Prayer-Book, and for the first time I looked up.

Opposite me stood—Margery. And the sunlight was round her head.

It could not be Margery, for she is dead. Only when I looked up my brain said 'Margery.'

NOVEMBER

NOVEMBER

When the service was over, I waited by the west front watching the congregation stream out of the gray gloom inside into the primrose-coloured lights of sunset. There were two big collies sitting patiently side by side on the edge of the grass, looking with liquid, eager eyes at the people coming out. Suddenly two tails began to thump ecstatically, but neither dog moved. It was She—I think I knew from their eagerness it could be none else. With a smile lurking in her eyes, she walked to them, and from where I was I could hear her say, 'Dear angels! come along,' and two tawny streaks fled over the grass.

I waited a little, then followed her. She turned southwards out of the Close, over the bridge, below which the big trout lie, and into the path through the water-meadows, the two tawny streaks cutting

figures like a swallow's flight up and down the road, running at top speed just for the joy of the life that was in them. And once clear of the town, she looked furtively round, saw only one wayfarer a hundred yards behind, and ran too. The wayfarer quickened his pace, ready to drop into a sedate walk if she looked round. Then on the edge of the water she found a stick, and, whistling to the dogs, threw it clean across the river, and a double plunge and splash of flying spray followed it. Then the streaks swam back, each holding an end of the beloved stick, dropped it at her feet, and, one on each side of her, shook themselves, so that she was between the waters, and I heard a faint scream of dismay and then a laugh. My house stands in the road close beyond the end of the meadows, but she went on, and still I followed, past the group of labourers' cottages, where lights were already springing up beneath the dark thatch, and out on to the main-road. And at that moment I guessed where she would go. Yes, to that house—no other—the house where Margery lived, the house which was the scene of my dark dreams in August last.

The collies rudely pushed their way in before her, after the manner of their impulsive kind, and the door was shut.

I was dining that evening with some people in the town, and met there an old friend of mine who lives a mile or two from here, who has usually some fault to find with me. She had this evening.

'You are a perfect disgrace,' she said. 'We consider you an old inhabitant of the town, and yet when new and charming people come you cannot find the civility even to leave a card.'

'I am sorry,' said I penitently. 'Who are they? You know, I have been away.'

'Well, they are coming here to-night,' she said.

'My dear lady, *who* are coming here to-night?'

Then the door opened, and they came, father and daughter.

This afternoon I went up the dark road of my dreams to call. She had said they would not be in till nearly six, and it was already deep dusk when I reached the house, which stood a black blot against the gray sky. But the window over the porch was lit and open, and the blind drawn

down over it, and from inside came a voice singing. I was admitted, but the hall was dark, and as the servant was feeling for the button of the electric light, a step passed along the passage at the head of the stairs and began to descend, and it was a step that caught my ear with a strangely familiar sound. Then halfway down, even at the moment the light was turned up, it paused, and a voice said, 'Oh! is there somebody?' and in the sudden blaze I saw her, and the passages were dark no longer.

'Ah, it's you,' she said; 'how nice of you to come! Oh, I've left the dogs shut up. Please go into the drawing-room; I'll be there in a moment.'

So I turned up the hall, to the right, and through the little sitting-room into the drawing-room beyond. She came in a moment afterwards.

'How did you know where the drawing-room was?' she said. 'Isn't it the most inconveniently built house you ever saw?'

'The most,' said I; 'but I know it well. There was a great friend of mine who used to live here——'

She looked up suddenly.

'Dick, do you mean,' she asked, 'who was killed in South Africa? He was a distant cousin of mine.'

'Then his wife was, too?' said I.

'Yes, I believe so. Why?'

'It partly accounts for it.'

'Accounts for what?' she said.

'That you are absolutely the living image of her.'

She laughed again.

'Oh dear! it is a terrible responsibility to be like an old acquaintance of somebody's. I shall have to live up to her. I do hope she wasn't very nice. It will be so difficult for me if she was.'

'She and Dick were the greatest friends I ever had,' said I.

Those beautiful gray eyes grew serious.

'Ah, how dreadful for you!' she said. 'It was all very sudden, was it not? The child, too!'

'Yes, very sudden. I had been dining with her here, and she had gone upstairs when the telegram came. She heard the ring, and leaned

over the banisters above the hall, and knew. Then the child was born. She died just at daybreak next morning. She asked me, I remember, to pull up the blind, and said, "Let in the morning." That was all.'

'Ah, poor thing—poor thing!' she said. Then she looked up at me: 'Poor thing!' she repeated.

The tea was brought in, and before many minutes her father came in also. They are coming to lunch to-morrow.

That night I was out to dinner, but came home early and sat for a long time in front of the fire, with work calling on me to do it, but simply incapable. What a strange, inexplicable coincidence it all is! How I long for, and dread, and love, and fear, the thought of these days that are coming! Surely this is meant to mean something! Think of the millions of little events and decisions which have gone to make up this particular conjuncture. Is it possible that they were all done in haphazard? Or is it another teasing problem that has been set me on the curious chequer-board of life, ending in my checkmate? just a piece of ingenious manœuvring of the pieces, all leading to

nothing? I cannot believe that. Yet if it is not that, if love is the answer to it all . . .

I love to be with her, and since that afternoon in the cathedral I have thought of nothing but her. But love her? I know it is not that—yet. It is, that, by this curious trick which Nature has played, I feel—I am cheated into feeling—that Margery is here with me again. It is as if there had been made an image of Margery, like in every respect, not only in externals, in voice, appearance, gesture, but in the deeper things as well—in her gaiety, her tenderness, and in that quick sympathy which sprang into being at the moment the call was made. Yet God never makes facsimiles; she, too, is a living soul, of her own identity, and none other's. Or—the wildest impossibilities riot in my brain to-night—is this some wraith of my Margery—Dick's Margery—sent, God knows from where, to comfort me or to drive me insane? Was there in my love for Margery, after she was Dick's wife, something which was evil, which kept suggesting, 'If this had been otherwise—if Dick died?' . . . Yes, there was that. Day after day there was that. I tried to fight it—indeed I tried.

But I did not conquer it for a whole year. But in June, on the last evening of all, when she spoke to me in the garden of the dear event that was coming, it dropped dead, or so I hoped and believed. Yet for a whole year I let it live : is God going to punish me for that by these cruel means? To make me love again, and again go hungry?

It cannot be ; again and again I tell myself it cannot be. But so I told myself when the telegram of Dick's death came, and in spite of all my telling it was true, and the tears of the whole world could not wash out a word of it. But if once more I am to go unrequited, I do not see how I can bear it. It would be wiser to see no more of this incarnation of Margery. At present I love seeing her, because—because that pressed and withered flower I always carry with me has, so to speak, blushed again with the hues of life, and a living fragrance breathes from it. But Helen—I think I have not mentioned her name before—this incarnation of Margery, is also a living woman, with an identity of her own. How if from loving her of whom she so sweetly and poignantly reminds

me I pass to loving the woman herself? And if she does not care?

No, I will see her no more. My life is my own, and I will not risk that great stake again. I know the unutterable sweetness of loving. I know, too, the unutterable emptiness of love unrequited, even though from her who loved me not I had such a wealth of tender and womanly affection. I know also how good the world is, how full and brimming with things that are lovely and of good report. For two years, in spite of what went before, God knows how much happiness I have been allowed to enjoy, how rich I have been, levying my tax of joy on all created things, finding music in all the strings of human emotions except one only—love, definite love for one woman. It is strange if I cannot be content without it. True, often and often I have felt, and shall feel again, that this would crown all the rest; but if I again do my part in it, let myself love this girl, and nothing comes of it, how well I know with what a sense of dejection and impotence I shall have to begin again from the beginning, picking up the scattered pieces of the structure known as 'I,'

fitting them together till some sort of coherent entity, a person of some kind, again pursues some sort of reasonable way through the world! And I distrust my own power of picking myself up again; I am afraid that this time I should let the pieces lie about, shrug shoulders at them, and drift, fossilize, vegetate, what you will.

Bitterness as black as sin and salt as the Dead Sea rises in my throat. What would I not give to see a mother with her child—my child—at her breast? How unspeakably I long for that! Was it my fault that Margery loved Dick, not me? Very good, it was my fault. I have borne the punishment, and I bear it now, and I shall always bear it; and I will try to avoid the possibility of being punished for another such fault.

So I fall back again on my life of little things. I will read the whole of Shakespeare through by next March; I will know a little more about gardening by next spring; I will try to keep my temper; I will try to do a little honest work at a book I am engaged on; I will try, dancing here with the rest of the human race, like a swarm of

flies in the sunlight, or, if you will, like worms in the dust, not to sting and wriggle; and I will try not to behave again as I behaved this morning, in this manner, to wit :

A small boy 'does' the shoes, boots, and knives of this establishment. He is blessed with sky-scraping spirits and a piercing whistle. He likes taking the boots up to my bedroom, because he slides down the banisters afterwards. I have frequently told him not to. This morning he whistled so loudly and continuously that I told myself it disturbed me, though, as a matter of fact, it did not, and I knew it. But without effort almost I worked myself into a fume of nagging ill-temper over it. Shortly after I heard him taking the boots up to my bedroom, and deliberately, like a spy, went to the door of the room where I was working, and held it ajar so that I might catch him sliding down the banisters. I was gorgeously successful, stood before him as he landed at the bottom with a face of April, and looked at him with an odious and baleful countenance till April fled. I wrung from him the admission that he had often been told not to do

this, and assured him that if he could not remember it was perfectly easy for me to find someone who could. Then I went back to work again with a sort of fiendish pleasure at having spoiled somebody's happiness, though it was only a boot-boy's. There was no more whistling from downstairs, and I congratulated myself on having secured tranquillity also at one fell swoop.

But after awhile the fiend within me, satiated, I suppose, by its brilliant achievement, dozed a little, and I felt simply sick at heart. Here was the worm in the dust stinging in its tiny, infinitesimal way, but with what infinity of malice! I would have given a great deal to have heard that shrill, unmelodious whistle strike up again, but it did not. Dead silence all morning. Then at lunch—coals of fire on my head—the knives winked with resplendence and cut like razors. Yet by the silly nature of things I cannot go into the boot-place and say I am sorry. I had told him again and again not to slide down the banisters —I had indeed. But if he does not whistle to-morrow morning I shall have to raise his wages.

That is another thing, then, I propose to cease doing by next March—that is to say, to cease transgressing against the supreme and perfect law of kindness and gentleness. I do not mean that I will have any sliding down the banisters, for I will not; but, on the other hand, I will not have myself, especially in little things, behaving like a cross-grained fiend. I could have stopped the banisters business without that, while, on the other hand, it would have been infinitely better all round that he should have continued to slide down the banister from morn till eve, than that I should have wished and intended (and succeeded therein) to spoil a child's happiness, if only for a morning, though it was in consequence of a direct act of disobedience, which I am perfectly right in resenting. And this is the supreme and perfect law of kindness.

It seems as if these golden days of sparkling sunshine and nights of clear frost will never end, but rise and still rise as out of some great well of light. Never do I remember such a November —windless, exquisite, so that the glory of scarlet

leaf, usually so swiftly gone and evanescent, scattered into ruin by an hour's wind, still flames in this long-drawn sunset of the year. Prey as I always am to the exaltations and depressions of the weather, it seems to me that I am living in some fairy story, as if the wicked witch who squirts the fogs and damps over the world was dead, and the good fairy of clear skies, though she cannot put the clock of the months back to summer, had allowed the seasons to stand still at this beautiful moment, to make up to us a little for all that we have suffered at the hands of the wicked witch. Everything has paused, and in those affairs which chiefly concern me there is a pause too—exquisite, golden. How the pause will end I cannot tell—in sounding ruin of rain, or the bursting of spring instead of the clasp of winter. All I know is that before long I shall find that the pause is over, and on that day I shall be sitting in fallen darkness, idly fingering in the palpable dusk the broken fragments of myself that lie round me; or even in this November I shall go out into the fields and find that, instead of the icy hand of winter gripping them, it will be

spring instead. For the winter will be passed, and the flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing birds is come. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.

Yes, it is even so, and I, who, a few nights ago only, determined to keep aloof from all possibility of this, preferring to stifle and drown the best of one's nature, for fear of being thrown out of gear as regards the second best, am led captive, glorying in the chain which, please God, I shall never be able to break. How witless and impotent is man, how futile and unreasonable all his reasonings, when love, like dawn, lights with rosy feet on his dark horizons, and the morning mists of all the schemes he has made, all rules and designs of life, vanish and have never been.

For what was I trying to do? To turn this garden of the Lord into a desert, to withdraw light from the day, love from life; when, had I known, it is love which turns the desert into the garden, into the home of one's soul.

'And thou
Beside me singing in the wilderness,
The wilderness were Paradise enow.'

How did it happen? How did it happen? Ah, it is because we do not know that it is so exquisite.

But the manner of it was this :

They came, as you know, to lunch some three days ago, and I dined there next day, though I had made up my mind, as you also know, not to see her again. That was my plan, and the sweet rain of blows battered it down and crushed it with supreme and certain suddenness. One moment—it was after dinner, I remember, and we were playing cards—I was looking at her, seeing in every line of her face that friend whom I had lost, and the next she looked up, and in her eye there sat, not Margery nor another, but Helen, wraith no longer, but herself. And as at that moment, now three years ago, when Margery, with the sun kindling her hair, said, 'It's going in ; what a darling!' even so now I surrendered ; I gave up all I had or was. The moment was to me so tremendous that I felt as if the whole world must know it. But even she did not know it, for she smiled and said, 'I think there must be another in,' and played

the thirteenth card, losing the game for herself and me.

Is it not prosaic that I remember that? Yes, if you wish, but it is just that prosaicness which makes the romance of life, the intertwining of the common little everyday affairs with the great lords of romance, Love and Death, who by their presence lift life entire into their domain, so that nothing is common or commonplace.

That night, as I walked home, it seemed to me that never before had Margery been so close to me. Do you know how sometimes you can almost *hear* a voice you are familiar with, so that it seems as if the person to whom it belongs had just spoken? It was so with me. Each moment it seemed as if she had just said something to me, and I waited and waited for what she should say next. Each moment I expected to see her walking by me, her arm in mine, as we had walked together in the garden the evening before she died. She knew, I must believe, what had happened, and, like the dear friend she always was, she came to tell me, as far as the laws of her world permitted,

that she was glad. Yet some immense but subtle change had come over our relations ; less dear she could not be, but I no longer ached for her. And that, too, I think she knew, and at that also she was glad.

Again that night I sat long by the fire, where those visions and inhuman schemes of self-isolation and petty mediocrity had beset me a few evenings ago. How infinitesimal had been their scope, and, thank God, how futile they proved! Like some timid child, my soul had sat shivering on the brink of the great ocean of human life, not daring to put out, distrusting the frail vessel which should carry it towards the golden island which no man can reach unless he adventures. Even then the golden gleam shone on me ; I saw the bright shining of those shores, and turned my face earthwards, saying that it was good to play with the shells and seaweed on the beach. Every day those waters which divide us from the golden island are thick with sails ; every day hundreds of happy adventurers land on its shores ; every day, too, hundreds are shipwrecked. But for me the wind beckons, my vessel flaps its sail, and

though I do not cast away the shells and seaweeds I have gathered, I put them in my locker and think no more of them just now. The tide favours: my vessel tugs its chain, and I put out.

DECEMBER

DECEMBER

Snow over all, and it is summer. Frost binds the icy fields, and in my heart every nightingale in the world makes melody. The bare trees are hung with icicles, and a shrill wind whistles through them; yet to me they are the green habitations of mating birds, and in the hedgerows, with their mask of snow where the wind has drifted it, are the nests of the hedge-sparrows with the blue eggs that reflect the skies of April. December! Was there ever such a December? All the honey of the summer, all the warmth of the long days, all the mellow autumn, all the promise of spring, is gathered here into one sheaf—the sheaf that we put in the chancel at the harvest festival, symbol of offering, symbol of the fruitful, kindly earth offering in kind to the Lord of the harvest.

Did you see the sun to-day about eleven in the morning come suddenly out through parted clouds

and shine on the great fields of virgin snow? He came on purpose to see me. Did you see the maddened whirl of the snow-flakes in the afternoon flying in eddies through the air? They were dancing together at my party. I engaged them to dance. They did it well, did they not? Did you hear the cathedral bells ringing this afternoon, sounding dim and deep through the snow? They were also my guests. Everything in the world to-day was my guest, and stars were ranged on my ceiling, and the Pleiades lay in my hand, and close by my heart there lay the moon, and it was not cold, as it looks, but warm.

Day after day and all day, night after night and all night, I have dreamed of the moon, loving it, desiring it. And last night I dreamed that I cast a slender silver thread into the sky, which caught the moon, and I drew it closer and closer to myself, till it rested on my heart. And it was not the moon at all, but the heart of a woman, beating full and strong. And the wonder of it is that the moon is mine. You shall see it sometimes, you other people on the earth, but all the time it is mine. I know, too, the other side of

it, when we are alone together. You cannot see that, and you will never see it. The moon says it is all for me.

To-day the moon had to be away all day, but the silver thread was between us (it leads to the other side of the moon), so I scarcely envied the folks in London, who would see her face merely. Yet all day I fevered for evening, and as evening approached my fever abated not. But you came back, my moon, and we were together again. Other people were there, and for them, as for me, melody after melody flowed from the sweet stress of your fingers. They heard only, but I knew, and to me the sound revealed not the poor clay that wrote those exquisite notes, but you who played them. Your soul it was, not Schubert's, that shone in the symphony that shall never be finished ; your soul, not Beethoven's, was passion and pathos—you, not he, turned night into a flame, and in that flame I burned and was consumed, happy as the gods are happy, and happier because I was not content. I shall never be content.

Oh, my own who did this, thanks is no word

between you and me. Do we thank the star that shines in the dark-blue velvet of the skies? We gaze only, and are drawn thither. For we thank a giver for a human gift; it is in silence that we give thanks for the things that are divine. Oh, I try to speak of what cannot be spoken! Who shall set words to your music?

Let me picture you again, with face half turned from where I sat, tuning the keys which I thought so rebellious into a rain of enchanted harmony. Rebellious, too, was your hair, rising upward in waves of smouldering gold from your face. And through Schubert you spoke to me, he but the medium or the alphabet of your thought, and I was almost jealous of the dead because he touched the tips of your fingers. Then from the trim garden at Leipsic spoke that sweet formal soul, a message of congratulation to me, or so I took it, and Beethoven with fuller voice said the same, and from frozen Poland and from wind-beaten Majorca came another smile. And when those sweet words were done, came other sweet words without interpreter; and the room was emptied and the larger lights were quenched, and

only on the walls leaped the shadows and the shine of the flames that plunged on the hearth. Once by night the Temple was bright to the prophet with the glory of the Lord, and the hot coal from the altar opened and inspired his lips. With what new vision and eyes enlightened must he have looked on the world after that night when God revealed Himself. And by this revelation which has come to me all things are made new, winter is turned to spring, the lonely places are desert no more, and the whole world is in flower with the royal purple of the blossoms of Love.

And now that I know it was inevitable from the first, I can hardly believe that it was I who only a few weeks ago made plans to force myself from the possibility. It was ordained from the beginning, and the patient march of the centuries, every step, every year, was bringing us together; myriads of subtle influences conspired to work it, and how excellent is the miracle they have made! Sunlight and wind, and the love and sorrow and joy of a thousand generations, have made the body and soul of this girl; for me was she predestined,

and for me has the whole creation laboured. Blindly but inevitably it wrought, even as the shell deep in some blue cave of the ocean thinks only that some piece of grit has got between its iridescent valves, yet all the time it is busy making the pearl that shall lie on the neck of some queen yet unborn.

An immense silence and whiteness lies over the whole earth. Snow fell a week ago, then came several nights of frost, and to-day again a fresh mantle of white was laid down. All roughnesses and inequalities are smoothed away. The whole land lies in delicate curves, swelling and subsiding in gradations too fine to follow. With bar and chevron, and a million devices of this celestial heraldry, trees and palings are outlined and emblazoned, and in the graveyard opposite the tombstones are capped with whiteness. From eaves and gutters hang the festooned icicles, and most people find it cheerless weather. But not so we, for between us, with the aid of a prodigiously stupid carpenter, we have designed and executed a toboggan, which is the chariot of love, and on the steep down-sides (attended by the puzzled collies,

who cannot understand how it is that snowballs, which so closely resemble tennis-balls, vanish in the retrieving) we spend vivifying afternoons. The toboggan has a decided bias, and it is only a question of time before it gets broadside to the slope of the hill, ejecting its passengers. That is the moment for which the collies (Huz and Buz) are waiting, and they fly after us and lick our faces before we can regain our feet, to congratulate us on the success of this excellent new game. Indeed, the 'Alliance of Laughter' is in league again, but below the laughter is love, which penetrates to the centre of the world and rises to the heaven of heavens. Then we tramp back, towing the slewing toboggan uphill, and getting our heels kicked by it downhill to the muffled town at dusk, and the long evenings begin.

I have told her all about Margery, as was only natural, but it was no news to her. She had guessed it, with woman's intuition, to which lightning is a snail, on the day when I told her how like she was to Margery. I had said 'She was my best friend' in a voice, it appears, that was the most obvious self-betrayal. I have told

her, too, the grim determination I had made not to see her any more. That, it appears on the same authority, was harmless though silly, since it was utterly out of my power to do anything of the kind. I couldn't have done it: that was all. I, of course, argued that I could; so she said, 'Well, do it now, then. It is not too late.'

But when I told her about Margery, she did not laugh, but she answered:

'I wanted so to comfort you. And I saw at first that you looked at me and thought of her. Then, by degrees, I wanted to take her place. And by degrees you let me have a place of my own. You looked at me and thought of me. That was one evening we played cards here.'

'You saw that?' I asked.

'How could a girl avoid seeing it, when all the time she——'

'What?'

'Nothing—at least, not much.'

'What, then?'

She came a little closer in the gleam of the firelight.

'When all the time she longed to see it,' she whispered.

'And is that not much? Is there anything in the world bigger than that?'

'No; it is bigger than the world.'

Oh, I am loved—I am loved!

* * * * *

It is Christmas Eve, and she has just gone home with her father, and outside in the moonlight the waits are singing. I know that they are not in tune, and that *qua* singing it is a deplorable performance, but there is such a singing in my heart that I do not hear the false notes, and the thrill of Christmas, too, is upon me. I have never quite got over (and I hope I never shall) the childish awe and mystery in hearing the voices from the night, being awakened by the sounds, and being carried, wrapped up in blankets, to the window, where I could see dim forms outside black against the snow. I did not know in those earliest years who they were. It was Christmas, and there were mysterious beings singing in the night. On no other night were

they there, for they were of the family, I must suppose, of Father Christmas and Santa Claus and the fairy Abracadabra, to whose awful presence—she appeared to be about nine feet high—we had been introduced, not without delightful inward quailings, before we went to bed. She brought with her a vessel of the shape certainly of a clothes-basket, but as it was of solid gold it could not have been a clothes-basket. And inside were exactly those things for which we each of us had pined and audibly hungered. Such a clever fairy! She never made a mistake or confused my wants with those of my brothers; so probably she was omniscient as well as beneficent. And my good fairies have been just as clever ever since. They never make mistakes, and now they have given me the best gift of all. So, listening to the singing in the night now, the years slip back, the child within me stirs and awakens, and out of the rose-coloured mists of early years that queer little figure, wrapped in blankets and carried to the window, looks wonderingly at me and smiles because I am happy. Abracadabra, too, is with me to-night, not nine feet high any longer, nor

girt about with delicious terrors for me, but still my dear fairy, who never fails me. You should have seen her meeting with Helen; the two who are dearest to me out of all the world, saw each other and loved each other on the moment, and Helen ran to her and called her 'mother.'

The singing in the night is long since silent; midnight has struck, and the house is very still in this first hour of Christmas Day. All afternoon, following the custom I have known from childhood, we made wreaths of evergreens for decoration of the doors, and the holly berries glow red in the dark green of the ivy. The scraps we burned on the hearth, and the green leaves are still crackling and popping, and the room is aromatic with the smell of them—the smell, so it always seemed to me, of Christmas. Outside the same wonderful windless frost still binds the earth, and in the dryness of the air the stars are visible nearly down to the horizon, and the sheets of snow sparkle dimly in the soft twilight of them. Yet I still linger here, finishing the few words that remain to be written of this

little book of months, which tells of happenings so tremendous and momentous to me, so infinitesimal to the world at large. It is a very inconsecutive performance, I know, very often dealing with interests so minute that, even as I write them, the time when what one writes assumes its greatest importance to one's self, I know I am risking boredom for somebody. But the remedy for such boredom is so simple: one has only to shut the book.

How well I remember the first day of the year, a morning of fog, with fugitive gleams of sun, type of the inscrutable young year, which now is flaming to its close in a glory of rose-coloured sunset! All I ever desired, all that I scarcely dared to desire, is mine, and yet this is only the promise of what shall be. The love which is mine is like a golden thread passing through the scattered beads of my days, threading them into a necklace which I place round her neck, so that it lies on her heart, and day and night moves to its beating, and rises and falls with her breath. O my beloved, whether you sleep or wake, it is there ; it is yours. Do you remember a day or

two ago how, quite suddenly, your eyes filled with tears, and when I asked you what that meant, you said, 'It is only because it is us, just you and I'? Even so.

THE END

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